

NOT BY MIGHT, NOT BY POWER

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This book is written in hope, with the purpose of stating observations of the Saints in the West at the present time and to stimulate thought, prayer and action to a positive end - towards a New Covenant expression of the Body of Christ in each location. It is essentially about faith in the Lord Jesus, the Christ of God, who is able to save all who come to Him.

Where particular denominations or traditions are mentioned it is purely for illustration and not to attack the members or adherents of those organisations.

Please note that for the purposes of this book some terms have been omitted purposely because of the subjective modern associations attached to those words. They are;

Baptism: The Greek word used in the New and Old Testaments (Septuagint) has no special religious or ritual significance, but simply means 'immersion' or washing of anything or anyone in some fluid. Due to the cultural bias of the translators this word is normally left in the Greek to make the association with a religious ritual. The religious ritual it has become associated with would depend on the background of the reader. So a Roman Catholic may think of one thing and a member of a Brethren group may think of something else. To avoid this subjective association I have often used the straight translation – immersion.

Church: This Germanic religious specific word again has various subjective meanings depending on the cultural background of the reader and did not figure in the Greek New Testament. Whatever it's origins (which are unclear and controversial to say the least) and original meaning; it is used in most English translations exclusively as an alternative translation to assembly or gathering, the simple meaning of the Greek word ekklesia. Again there has been a retrospective replacement of a secular, non religious word for gathering, interchangeable with other Greek words for collection, set, or group. As the subjective associations we have with this emotive word may often be a long way from the simplicity of assembly or gathering, I have not used the word church much except in context of modern western religious term for a sect or a religious building.

Gospel: Another Anglo-Saxon word that has taken on subjective meaning according to the usage experienced. The Greek word so translated simply means good message or good announcement and again was a secular word, whereas Gospel is now a religious word with very specific connotations to different people. The Anglo Saxon god spiel was okay for the Anglo Saxons as it then simply meant 'good spiel' or good message. Spiel is still an English colloquial word for story or message. I have used 'message' or other none religious terms. I have kept to the word gospel in connection with the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and the fourth gospel - John.

Disciple: A good enough translation of the Greek word 'mathitis' but now with heavy religious or cult overtones. The word pupil could equally well be used and would better convey the straightforward sense of the original. The teacher – pupil relationship should be unambiguous and clear.

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Chapter 1: OUTER DARKNESS.

Matthew 8:11 “And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

In February 1984 I was driving down the A1 motorway from the North East of England to London to buy some machinery in connection with my business. At 5 o'clock in the morning I passed the Scotch Corner intersection where I went into the overtaking lane to avoid a heavy lorry that had just joined the dual carriageway. It was freezing cold outside and it had been snowing in the days before my trip. As I overtook the articulated lorry at seventy miles per hour the slipstream buffeted my van away and towards the central reservation. Turning the steering wheel to steer the van back into line with the road resulted in nothing happening - the van carried on turning towards the central barrier.

I was on black ice and knew what would happen next. The van moved forward at speed while at the same time spinning round slowly in a clockwise direction. It was a safe bet that I would end up in the opposite carriageway and that the next heavy vehicle from that direction would plough into me at a combined speed of around one hundred and twenty miles an hour.

Everything went pitch black dark as the van somersaulted through the air, spinning now through two axis, vertical and horizontal as it collided with the central barrier and tipped up. In the darkness, hearing and feeling the collisions where the van thumped various objects in its path I knew I was about to die. I was going to see Jesus face to face. But I wasn't happy. I felt a deep sense of loss and being alone in the darkness, aware of having nothing to bring him. No stars in my crown, not afraid but with an overwhelming sense of regret that I'd somehow failed my Master.

In hindsight I realise that I had been given a taste of what it would be like to be cast into outer darkness away from the presence of God. Made all the worse as I had not been ignorant of what God had done in sending His only begotten Son into the world as the Lamb of God Who takes away sin. A sense of wailing and gnashing of teeth, being completely alone in absolute darkness without any hope for all eternity.

I was not ready to face the judgement that follows death. I was not ready at that moment as I had not heard the message of repentance and remission of sins in the name of Jesus Christ. Had I done so then I'd have been baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission (removal – releasing from) my sins. This was not to occur until 2009 – 25 years later.

The bumps and the noises stopped. The van was upright so I cut the engine and climbed out. It had come to a halt on a break in the central reservation, which was provided so that traffic could be diverted from one lane to another during road works to either carriageway. It was facing the correct way and traffic was able to pass safely in each direction.

A security man who worked at the air force base nearby and was taking his wife to work there came to see how I was. They had been following my van and his wife had just vomited with shock after seeing the van flying through the air, convinced that I would be smashed to bits. The roof of the van above my head had an indentation, which was a perfect profile of the steel barrier along the reservation. It came to within one millimetre above where my head had been.

The van was no longer rectangular in shape but like a cardboard box which had been pushed at two opposite corners. I was without a scratch or a bruise. God had been doubly gracious to me. I was delivered from harm and yet had been allowed to taste death and the sorrow of being cast into outer darkness as an unprofitable servant. I thank God for both.

CHAPTER 2: "DISCIPLES - PUPILS"

When I was seventeen and about to leave Gateshead Grammar School for Boys I was a typical teenage intellectual snob; - not so much an intellectual, more of a snob. My two friends from school, Billy, Ron and I were 'into' beat poetry; - Bob Dylan fans fantasising about going off to Kathmandu, and well on our way to sorting out the 'meaning of life'. This was in nineteen sixty-six and just before the Hippie Revolution. Most of our 'beat' contemporaries evolved later into hippies. Some into school teachers and some into social workers.

Related to the 'intellectual' poetry thing we had started reading the Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes and Proverbs in the Old Testament. I couldn't understand much of it but that was part of the attraction. We could recognise that it had an aura of wisdom and truth nonetheless. About this time we had been to see the motion picture 'The Greatest Story Ever Told', a film of the life of Jesus. This left me with the impression that Jesus had been a true 'beat' and had come to show folks that there was more to life than the mere mechanics of existence. What that might be, again I wasn't quite sure. He seemed to have had 'The Word' which all beats were continually looking for but never quite finding. I cried during the crucifixion scenes. The resurrection part seemed very sketchy and did not tie things up tidily to my satisfaction. The overall effect was to create in us all an empathy with the man Jesus; he was eminently 'cool'.

The songs of Bob Dylan had created an awareness of social injustice, racism, hypocrisy within the system and man's inhumanity to man. Protest and non-conformity was becoming my motivation. This was all nicely re-enforced by Ron and Billy's company who were similarly smitten.

In May of that year we had been camping in Plessey Woods and we spent a whole night talking about creation, the stars, the universe and eternity. Out there in the woods under the stars it was all mind blowingly beautiful and awesome to us. I came to the conclusion that I did not know who God was but whoever he was, I couldn't help but love him.

One Sunday evening, around about nine thirty, Ron and I were strolling through the Bigg market in Newcastle upon Tyne. I was carrying my white semi-acoustic guitar. This was a very popular night-spot full of bars, snooker halls, coffee bars and night-clubs. Folk would go from place to place in the course of an evening, especially at weekends. On Sunday evenings it was also a bit like Speakers Corner in Hyde Park in as much as in the centre of the cobbled market place various groups would have open-air meetings and speeches.

At the top end was the communist party. They appeared very passionate, clever intellectuals and raving idealists. It was obvious that there was no room for debate or discussion with them. On down to the next group, the Catholic Evidence Society as advertised by the white lettering on the black board. This was a new one on me. I thought people were born Catholics? It consisted of a priest at the top of a pair of step ladders with three women fans standing at a suitable distance in front of him, hanging on to every quietly spoken word. I couldn't actually hear anything he was saying. On to the next group. This was a homogenous circle of about thirty well-dressed and groomed mainly middle aged men and women. They were paying dutiful attention to a middle aged man in the middle of the circle with his dark grey trilby hat in his hand. A lot of the men had dark grey trilby hats. We noticed that he was talking in a confident manner, which suggested that he had done this kind of thing before, talking about Jesus and some woman at a well some two thousand years earlier. Those listening obviously approved of the story and one older gentleman, also wearing a dark grey trilby, was anticipating the speaker and joining in as if it were a well-rehearsed tale. We didn't like the look of what these people's religion had done to their individuality and moved on down to the next group, a large circle instantly recognisable as the Salvation Army. We had a pretty good idea of what they were about and moved quickly on to the final group at the lower end of the market.

This was a motley gathering of assorted individuals as was clear from their differing dress and accents. I liked that. They were singing cheerful songs about Jesus and taking it in turns to stand in the centre of the ring, some shaking with nerves, and talking about what Jesus had done for them that week! I couldn't help wondering what

motivated such an individual to do that. Soon a pleasant, confident young man who offered us a tract and attempted to engage us in conversation approached us. The guitar was an easy talking point and he asked us if we liked music. He said that they had a special speaker from America the following weekend and that he would be playing the saxophone. He asked us if we would like to go and hear him. When he said “go and hear him”, we thought he meant hear him play the saxophone! As we had a huge window in our social schedule at that time we said we would and the following Saturday night duly went to their building called Bethshan Tabernacle!!! (How the name didn't put us off I'll never know.)

I was surprised to find that there were quite a number of young people there and wondered what sad reasons they had for being at a place called Bethshan Tabernacle on a Saturday night. I told you I was a snob. People were however genuinely friendly and interested in us which was very gratifying.

The American was middle aged, very cheerful, and, as Americans were few on the ground in those parts in those days, a novelty. He didn't play the saxophone that evening. He talked. I listened carefully as he told the story of a young Italian American boy of twelve years who was very ill and diagnosed as suffering from kidney failure. The doctor had said that there was nothing he could do. The child's mother had gone to the priest and asked him to pray that the boy would be healed but the priest had said that if it was God's will, then God would take the child. The boy's skin turned black and he fell into a coma. The priest was called and he gave the boy the last rites. It was evening and an envelope was pushed through the door of the house where he was in bed. In the envelope was a handkerchief and a note. The note said to place the handkerchief on the boy and in the name of Jesus Christ he would recover. The mother of the dying child placed the handkerchief on his chest and went to bed. The next day the boy got up, ate a big breakfast and this was the boy, now grown up into a large healthy looking specimen, telling the story! I was impressed. I wasn't quite sure how to take this story, given the fact that the guy was standing there. Maybe there was more to the Universe than was taught by the atheists in biology class at school. We left with something to think about.

That was in July and at the end of the month we would be leaving school to start our 'adult' life. Yeeeesss!

The three of us left school earlier than we were supposed to the last day. We walked over the High Level Bridge from Gateshead to Newcastle where we sat on a bench and considered the enormity of the moment. Bill asked the question out loud for us, “What happens now?” It was an exciting and somewhat daunting prospect. Everything was now open to us. If only we knew what it was.

We had planned to hitch hike down from Gateshead, where we lived, to London, an exciting prospect, and then on down to Brighton, an even more exciting prospect. There we would hang out with the beats on the beach and maybe get discovered like Donovan had. When you are seventeen you don't hang about. The next evening we were assembled on the side of the old A1 Great North Road just south of Low Fell in Gateshead. We started thumbing for lifts and walking south.

On the way down it rained quite a lot, like it can during July and August in England. There were three of us with our haversacks, sleeping bags and a semi acoustic guitar, not ideal for getting lifts, especially as cars were typically smaller in those days. Even in a lorry cab it was quite a squeeze. Consequentially the lifts were not forthcoming at any great speed and we had a fair bit of time to think as we were walking or waiting. When we got to a roundabout on the A1 near Nottingham, at the Grantham turnoff, we slept in a bus shelter, as it was dark. I woke up at about four o'clock in the morning covered with little spiders and wet as it had started raining in on me. Getting up I went outside and stood at the corner of the roundabout with a plastic sheet over my head. The light was just beginning to dispel the darkness of the night when I felt a great euphoria rising up from my stomach and was suddenly aware that God loved me. I didn't know how I was aware of this but I knew God loved me and was interested in me and wanted me for some reason. Wow! I just stood there in the gentle rain for what must have been at least an hour with this great joy in my heart - God loves me!

In the meanwhile the sun had come up and a mustard coloured VW Caravette came round the bend and pulled up just past me. Inside were two identically dressed and groomed American Mormons. This was a time of campaign for the Mormons in England. I asked them if they could give my sleeping friends and me a lift to Grantham and then woke them up and we piled in. We sat on the bench seats at the back of the Caravette in silence while the two Mormons totally ignored us and didn't speak one word. On a seat was a black leather bound book, which looked like a serious bible to me. At Grantham they dropped us off with barely a glance and we thought - weird!

After walking through Grantham and a brunch of a pint of milk, bread and some cheese, we got back on the road to London. My friend Billy tells me that he has been praying for lifts on the journey and has just prayed for a white pick-up to take us to Watford. We had borrowed a book of UK maps from Gateshead Library. Shortly afterwards a white pick-up stops and gives us a lift to Watford. I was impressed. We arrive in London and walk through Regent Park to sleep on the benches. I was not impressed with London. It was just like the worst parts of Newcastle but a lot bigger. Well, you live and learn.

The next day we walked through London to Croydon and eventually hitched a lift to Brighton. We headed for the beach and there we found a little wooden hut with a door that had no lock. Inside was a little pile of rubbish and we decided it was perfect for us. The three of us could manage to bed down snugly in our sleeping bags on three sides of the pile of rubbish in the centre. It didn't enter our heads to move the rubbish! The third day we were there it was raining like it did most of that week. We were sitting on our sleeping bags in the hut with Billy and Ron playing the guitar and harmonica. The door was open to the sea and a tramp came in out of the rain and crouched in the doorway. He had a big bottle of cider in his hand and said that it was written in the book of Proverbs in the Bible that it was good to drink wine on a rainy day. It made sense to me. He appeared to be a simple and benign man and he gave me a copy of Saint John's Gospel in modern English, the Living Bible version. I took this and read it within about forty minutes and gave it back to him. I couldn't make head nor tail of it. I noticed there was a lot about Jesus in it but I didn't have a clear idea of who he was. God I understood, but Jesus? I then asked him if he knew if there was a Pentecostal church in Brighton. I didn't know what Pentecostal meant, I just knew that this was the sort of church Bethshan was. He told us where there was such a place and that there was a meeting on Sunday at six o'clock.

Come Sunday we were sitting in hard polished pews in a half-filled room with the hushed air of a doctor's waiting room. Not surprisingly no one sat beside or spoke to us as by now we looked and smelt a little unsavoury. The meeting started and we stood to sing hymns we recognised from school assembly and listened to announcements about a building fund. At one point a plate of small fragments of cream crackers was passed around followed by small glass thimbles of blackcurrant juice. Bemused, we partook of these and after someone spoke for a little while another song was sung. Then everyone piled out as if class was dismissed. Not a little disappointed we stood outside the external doors of the building on the street in what is known as 'The Lanes'. As the folks milled around us on their way out I asked a young man if this was the 'Pentecostal church'. He pointed up at the arched sign above the doorway and said; "Yes, there you see, 'Elim Pentecostal Church'."

At that moment, looking up at the sign, I suddenly felt another overwhelming glow of euphoria spreading from my stomach upwards. It was as if I was instantly drunk. My heart was in my mouth with ecstasy. I thought, 'this must be heaven, I am going to heaven'. I wanted to go to heaven there and then. I wouldn't have minded getting knocked down as I crossed the road. I knew this was God and that He was now my Father somehow but absolutely nothing else. Foolishly, perhaps, I turned to my friend Billy who was standing right beside me and asked him if he felt what I was feeling, but I couldn't tell him what I was feeling. Later he told me that he had felt an overwhelming conviction of his sinfulness at that moment. He then went to a public toilet, got down on his knees and asked God to forgive him. I was blissfully unaware of sin at that time. I only knew God loved me and had come to me in some fantastic way. Much later I was to come to understand that the presence of the Holy Spirit falling upon me had convicted Billy of his sin.

In that moment I was changed. I had passed from death into life. I didn't know any of the terminology or mechanism or why, but I was changed. We soon decided to go back home to Gateshead and we got a lift from a lorry going straight there from North London. We had discovered that a lot of the people we had come into contact with on the beach were perverts, phoneys or desperate folk who had to be prepared to do almost anything to survive. We had enjoyed the stay but weren't impressed.

We got back home on a Sunday and the following evening Billy and I went to the prayer meeting at Bethshan. I wanted to see John, the lad who had asked us to come that night in the Bigg Market, and tell him that he was right, there was a God. When I told him this he looked pleased but wisely told me, yes there is a God, and he loves us, but there was something called sin which had to be dealt with in order for us to be able to have a relationship with him.

There followed a period of me going along to all the meetings at Bethshan, hearing a conventional evangelical Gospel message on successive Sunday evenings and 'going out to the front to receive Jesus as my personal Saviour', several times. I eventually came to the point of realising that whatever they wanted to happen had happened by the sheer grace of God there on the street outside the Elim church in Brighton. In terms of salvation there wasn't anything more for me to get from the folks at Bethshan. There was something more I needed to hear of the message of repentance and remission of sins in the name of Jesus Christ, through baptism in the name of Jesus for the remission of my sins but I was unaware of this. God had baptised me in the Holy Spirit by his choice and sovereign grace. Later I came to understand how that had been made possible through the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross for my sins and the sins of the whole world. But he had baptised me in the Holy Spirit when I didn't understand anything of the good news of the kingdom of God. As the good folks at Bethshan had not received the message of repentance and remission of sins by the name of Jesus Christ it is understandable that they did not preach it. God had a time and season in which He would allow me to hear this good news that is by revelation of Jesus Christ but I would have to wait forty-three years.

In due course after enquiring I was immersed in water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit after their particular manner, apparently for no particular reason other than it was 'scriptural'. Later still I was informed that God wanted to immerse me in the Holy Spirit so that I would have power to live the life he intended for his children. After a number of attempts to receive the Spirit at 'receiving meetings' I did receive another filling with the Holy Spirit, with speaking in tongues this time, and I knew then that this was that which had happened initially in The Lanes in Brighton. At Bethshan they didn't share the instruction to be immersed in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins as they had not received that part of the good news of repentance and remission of sins themselves. I learnt that people can only share what they themselves have received.

So I had become a disciple - pupil of the Lord Jesus, the Christ. By the enormous free grace of God I had been born of the Holy Spirit. I knew this would mean doing the will of God, not doing my own thing. In my case this meant taking a boring job in Gateshead instead of trekking off to Kathmandu or Israel. There was faith, repentance and obedience to the limited revelation of the gospel I had been exposed to. I had not been born of water. As remission of sin is only in the name of Jesus I was lacking this. Much later (forty three years) after hearing this important part of the good news I was immersed in the name of Jesus for the remission of my sins. There are instances in the book of Acts of others who were immersed in the name of Jesus after being instructed more accurately in the good message of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus or after receiving the Holy Spirit, like Apollos in Acts chapter 18, the twelve or so disciples in Ephesus; Acts chapter 19; and the household of Cornelius in Acts chapter 10.

The point of me telling you how I came to be born of the Holy Spirit is to illustrate the fact that salvation is the free gift of God. It can't be earned. It cost me nothing but cost God the blood of his only begotten Son. This salvation through a new birth of the Holy Spirit and of water is the promise of the Father. It is his plan, his doing A free gift that whoever believes, receives. It is open to little children, indeed, as Jesus said, except we are converted and become as little children, we will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Also it was by

the supernatural power of God, so that my faith would be in His power, not in man's form of words, creeds or theory.

On the other hand, being, or continuing as, a disciple/pupil of Jesus Christ is up to us. Sure, God enables those born of the Spirit to be pupils of Jesus but it is clearly up to us whether we continue as His disciples/pupils or not. Jesus asks us to deny our own souls, take up our own cross daily and 'stick with Him'. The Greek word used is 'akolouthw' which while meaning follow gives the sense of following because of connection, like a train follows the engine – because it is hooked up! I have to die daily because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. It is not by might, nor by strength, but by the Spirit of the Living God. By eating of the flesh of Jesus Christ and drinking His blood – putting on Christ in the Spirit.

While at Bethshan I gradually absorbed a misunderstanding of what it meant to be a disciple of Christ today. This may have been because I started to confuse the picture of the disciples/pupils of Jesus before his death and resurrection with the new experience which is open to us also who believe, of being a disciple/pupil after the day of Pentecost, when the promise of the Father was given to Jesus Christ and He poured this out on all flesh.

The word disciple may conjure up mental pictures of men with beards wearing long robes following another man with a beard and wearing a long white robe. They would follow their teacher and master around, listen to his teaching, be involved in helping him in his work and serve him. The Greek word used in the New Testament is 'mathitis', from which we get mathematics. It means simply learner, pupil or student. Disciple is a good enough alternative to pupil if you speak King James English, but in our modern western society it does not immediately suggest simply pupil. Unfortunately nowadays it is loaded with a religious specific connotation. So from now on in the text I will use the better word pupil also. Jesus used everyday, common, simple terms. He does not intend the good news to be hidden behind archaic or confusing terms.

Jesus went to great lengths to spell out the way they would be his pupils after the Spirit came, as is recorded over five chapters in the gospel of John. I would ask you to read from chapter thirteen to the end of chapter seventeen. Let us take a look at it.

In chapter thirteen we are told that Jesus knew the time had come for him to leave this world and consequentially this was going to be a crisis time for his pupils. How could they be pupils of someone who was no longer around? Jesus had called them to forsake all and physically follow him and learn from him. They had learned from him principally by being with him and observing him and listening to him. Another important part of being a pupil was serving their teacher. By giving their teacher service they were paying for their instruction. Now he was about to leave them. How could they continue to be his pupils?

After the last Passover supper Jesus begins his final instructions to his pupils by washing their feet. He draws their attention to the fact that he is their Teacher and Lord and this is the basis of teacher – pupil relationship. He says plainly that he has washed their feet as an example for them to imitate. "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them." Washing his or her feet was a very humble and practical thing to do for someone. Perhaps on a par with washing the toilets, necessary but unglamorous and low on the list of things we would like to do. Unlike washing toilets however, this was a very personal service. Jesus was doing a practical, unglamorous humble service for each one of them in turn. It was a service they would normally have been very glad to receive. Their feet would be hot, covered in dust and other unpleasant stuff as a result of the day's walking in open sandals on dry dusty tracks shared with goats, sheep and donkeys. This demonstration then was the dramatic introduction to his teaching them about the new way that they would be his pupils after he had gone. They would do as He would teach them and serve Him by serving one another. The earthly object of their service was to change from their teacher to their teacher's brethren (family) – fellow pupils, while the teacher would from now on be the Holy Spirit who is also called the Spirit of Christ and the mind of Christ.

After Judas had left, Jesus continued to spell out how they were to be his pupils.

John 13:33 “Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek me; and as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come,’ so now I say to you. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my pupils, if you have love for one another.”

Peter then breaks in with a question about where the Lord is going and Jesus eventually continues on his main theme with;

John 14:15 “If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Instructor, (or Encourager, Counsellor, Comforter, Advocate. The word in the Greek text is ‘paraklitos’, used in the New Testament only by the writer of the fourth gospel, here to describe the Holy Spirit and in his first letter chapter two verse one to describe Christ as our Advocate. The associated verb ‘parakaleo’ is translated in the New Testament variously as beseech, comfort, exhort, desire, pray, entreat, call for. Basically the parakletos is someone who verbally advises, exhorts and communicates encouragement: - a communicator.) That he may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; but you know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”

Jesus continues; **John 14:21** “He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. If anyone loves me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me. These things have I spoken to you while being present with you. But the Counsellor (Paraklitos: - Communicator), the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance (consciousness) all things that I said to you.”

John 15:9 “As the Father loved me, I also have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things have I spoken to you, that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.”

John 15:26 “But when the Counsellor (Paraklitos:- Communicator) comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will testify of me.”

John 16:5 “But now I go away to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send him to you. And when he has come, he will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement: of sin, because they do not believe in me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father and you see me no more; of judgement, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak; and he will tell you things to come. He will glorify me, for he will take of what is mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are mine. Therefore I said that he will take of mine and declare it to you.”

So, after Jesus had gone, the Holy Spirit would come and take over the role of teacher and leader from Christ. The Holy Spirit would be in them. Just as Jesus had spoken the words of the Father to them, so the Holy Spirit would speak the words of the Father to them. And not only to them, but to all who would believe, as Peter declared on the day of Pentecost;

Acts 2:32 “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool.”’ Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both the Lord and the Christ.” and he went on;
Acts 2:38 “Repent, and let every one of you be baptised (immersed) in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins; and you shall receive (take hold of, seize) the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to all who are afar off. As many as the Lord our God shall call.”

In those early post Pentecost days the believers were still called, and truly were, disciples (pupils) of Jesus the Anointed King. However, the unbelievers could not see whom those pupils were being taught by! You can't be taught by or serve a dead person. The world cannot see or hear the Holy Spirit. It is not surprising then that eventually in Antioch the followers of the Christ were given the name ‘Christians’ by the unconverted.

Can we now see the two separate, although linked, states of being born of the Holy Spirit into a new and living way - salvation, and of continuing as a pupil of Jesus Christ? The first is what God does to us out of what he has done for us in Christ. The second is a continuing experience, which is up to us as we listen to and obey the Holy Spirit daily bringing to us the words of the Father. As is written in **1 John 2:27** “But the anointing which you have received from him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone should teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in him.”

And he (Jesus) said to them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give you. I say to you, though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needs. And I say to you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask for a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

The fabulous, great, fantastic news of the kingdom of heaven is that it is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom.

Luke 12:22 And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say to you, Take no thought for your life, what you shall eat; neither for the body, what you shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them: how much more are you better than the fowls? And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If you then are not able to do that thing which is least, why take thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say to you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he not you, O you of little faith? And seek not what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, neither be of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knows that ye have need of these things. But rather seek the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added to you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

We seem to have the opportunity to experience the kingdom of heaven in daily doses, on a day by day basis. Our sins are forgiven; the price of our redemption has been paid, by our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, once for all.

So each day we may with boldness approach the throne and ask our Heavenly Father to give us the Holy Spirit for that day. As the kingdom is not of this world, and flesh and blood cannot enter in to it, it is essential that we avail ourselves of the gift of God, the promise of the Holy Spirit. We can continue in the Spirit if that is our priority; we deny our own souls and offer up our bodies as living sacrifices daily.

Like the manna from heaven in the wilderness, one day's portion will not carry over to the next day. It is so easily possible to start in the Spirit and yet to go on in the flesh. This can be religious flesh or secular in manifestation.

It is also evident that some receive more of the Holy Spirit and more often, than others.

The difference is discernible and obvious.

The company of the disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem was advised by the apostles to;

Acts 6:3 Wherefore, brethren, look out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost.

The fact that we can see when others are full of the Holy Spirit should alert us to the fact that we really can know whether we ourselves are full of the Holy Spirit or not.

We are not filled with the Spirit because we believe 'the right things'. Or because we 'feel good'.

We are filled with the Spirit when we put aside our thoughts and ways. 'come, take and eat.' And then we are filled.

The fruits of the Spirit being in us are these...

The works of the flesh are.....

The kingdom of heaven is not in words but in power, righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Words are something the flesh delights in.

Those men filled with the Holy Spirit were so because they wanted to be so.

The kingdom of heaven suffers force and the violent take it by force (seize hold forcefully)!

We can have as much filling with the Holy Spirit as we will insist on.

In this way we abide in Jesus, and He in us. The Spirit of Christ in us bears much fruit.

Living in our own flesh, we produce the works of the flesh.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit does not make us stupid or irresponsible.

On the contrary, men filled with the Spirit were chosen to do difficult clerical and administrative jobs re the distribution of daily provisions or cash to the widows in Jerusalem. Tables in the culture of the time were used for accounting work, not for eating off!

Nonetheless, in order to be filled with the Spirit, our focus has to be on the eternal kingdom of heaven first and not on the affairs of this world, which is passing away.

To those who have not yet been filled with the Holy Spirit; Jesus says to you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.

To those who have been filled with the Holy Spirit, but not much, not lately; Jesus says to you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.

To those who can hardly remember the last time they knew they were full of the Holy Spirit; Jesus says to you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.

The only thing we absolutely must have in order to continue as disciples of Jesus in reality is to daily ensure that we are being filled again with the Holy Spirit and presenting our bodies as living sacrifices.

It really is not by might, not by power, not by the wisdom of this world, but by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus would have us experiment, rather than speculate. Experience rather than debate. Ask with faith rather than just be hopeful.

What are we waiting for?

We each have the same opportunity of following Jesus the King and hearing him speak to us through the Holy Spirit as those early disciples had after Pentecost. We do not have the opportunity that they had before Pentecost when they saw Jesus going around Galilee and Judah, of hearing him say, "leave all and follow me."

At that time they had to leave everything behind if they wanted to listen to the physical Christ as he wasn't staying put in one place. They had the privilege of actually seeing, hearing and serving him in the flesh. However we are in a better situation. We have the Holy Spirit with us, in us, teaching, leading and counselling us. We can serve Jesus through serving our brothers and sisters. We have His complete attention. We can let Him have our complete attention. We still have to be prepared to forsake all to follow Christ in as much as we don't know in advance what he may ask of us. It's a bit like shaking on a deal and making payment as it is asked for later. Also the Holy Spirit needs to have our complete attention. We cannot sow to the flesh and to the spirit simultaneously. We do have to actually die daily to our own flesh and to the world, denying our own souls in order that we might live in the Spirit. Otherwise, having commenced in the Spirit we may continue or proceed in the flesh, as did the Galatians. See Galatians chapter 3.

We have a clear indication of what the result of being a pupil of Christ will be. This is that we will become like the Christ, loving one another, serving one another and laying down our lives for one another. As it is written in **1 John 3:16** "By this we know love, because he laid down his life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." And as Paul wrote, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

I have found that many who would without hesitation affirm that they have been born of the Holy Spirit find it difficult to believe that the Holy Spirit actually will speak to them. I often get asked; "How do you know that it is the Holy Spirit speaking?" I would ask; "How do you know that it was the Holy Spirit that you were initially immersed in?" The sad fact is that if we can't recognise the voice of the Spirit then we haven't started being pupils of Jesus. How did any of the prophets and writers of the Old and New Testaments know it was the voice of the Spirit speaking to them? When you were converted, what voice were you hearing that brought repentance and faith to you? If we have been born again of the Spirit we should recognise his voice by now! Jesus didn't tell His pupils how they would know the voice of the Spirit. Those born of the Spirit and filled with the Spirit know the Spirit. The conscious presence of the Holy Spirit is absolutely stunning. Sometimes quiet maybe, but always tangible.

As Jesus said; **John 10:14**; "I am the good shepherd and I know my sheep and am known by my own. As the Father knows me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear my voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd." It really does come down to; "let him who has ears to hear, hear." This is what Jesus meant when he said 'unless the Father draws you, you cannot believe.' It was the Spirit who drew me, and who drew you, if indeed you have received the Spirit and are then of the Christ.

Paul echoes this in **Romans 8:1**. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in the Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit: **Romans 8:8**. "So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you: For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God." Paul also wrote in **1 Corinthians 2:10**. "But God has revealed them to us by his Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, even the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual."

Often a misplaced emphasis on the role of the scriptures can be something of a hindrance to our hearing the Spirit. While the Spirit can and often does speak to us through the scriptures the reverse is not always true. We don't always read or hear scripture through the Spirit. While they contain truth, they aren't magic words. We do have our preconceived notions and ideas born of human tradition which can misinterpret and mess up generally

our reception of the truth when it is right in front of us. The New Testament was written by disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ mainly for disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. When we have experienced our own Pentecost, Acts 2 reads differently than if we have not. When we have heard the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ that Phillip preached in Samaria, Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, Paul preached in Ephesus; then we can read the book of Acts without ignoring the necessity and privilege of repentance with baptism (immersion) in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and the normal experience of receiving the Holy Spirit with signs of prophecy and speaking in tongues.

We are told in the prophecy of Joel concerning the outpouring of the Spirit; **Joel 2:28**. “And it shall come to pass afterwards that I shall pour out my Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; And also on my menservants and on my maidservants I will pour out my Spirit in those days.”

What is clear from this is the fact that the Holy Spirit is come on all flesh to communicate. Prophecy is communicating the word of God as received from the Spirit. Dreams and visions are ways in which the Spirit communicates truths to his people. By mentioning sons, daughters, old folks, young folks, menservants and maidservants he makes the point that when he says all flesh he means all flesh down to you and me. No one is excluded.

In **Numbers 11:25** we read; “Then the Lord came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same Spirit upon the elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did so again. But two men had remained in the camp; the name of the one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them. Now they were among those listed, but who had not gone out to the Tabernacle; yet they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses and said, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” So Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, one of his choice men, answered and said, “Moses my Lord, forbid them!” Then Moses said to him, “Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them!”

In the Old Testament the only people who received the Holy Spirit were generally the prophets and Kings. This was why they were anointed with the Spirit, so they could communicate the word of God to the people. We can see this clearly in John the Baptist. He was anointed with the Spirit from his youth and was the prophet heralding the coming of the Messiah. In the fourth Gospel (John) we are informed that he was standing with two of his pupils. If you wanted to hear the contemporary word of God then, the only way was to hear through a prophet anointed with the Spirit. So these men who wanted to hear from God were disciples/pupils of John, waiting to hear the latest word of God through him.

Then one day John sees Jesus and proclaims; “Behold, the Lamb of God.” And straightaway two pupils of John leave him, a mere man anointed with the Holy Spirit, and follow the Messiah, Emmanuel, God in flesh. They made a wise decision. Now they were pupils of God himself. They could hear God in the Christ Jesus first hand. This is the intermediate stage between the Old and the New. Finally on the day of Pentecost the promise of the Father, as quoted from Joel, descends upon them and they prophesy in foreign languages, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the mind of the Christ. Now they were pupils of the Christ by listening to the Holy Spirit who was within them. This same promise is to us also who believe, repent and submit to baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission (release from) our sins.

It is important also to see that the Christ has left his disciples, his body, to carry on his work. It cannot be ‘just Jesus and me’. This is demonstrated wonderfully in the account of Saul’s conversion in Acts. Here Saul is asked, “Why do you persecute me?” When Saul inquires, “who are you Lord?” he gets the reply; “It is I, Jesus”. Saul was actually engaged in persecuting the disciples of Jesus – those everywhere who called on the name of Jesus Christ -; which Jesus identified as ‘me’. Then Jesus tells Saul to go to Damascus and there he will be “told what you must do.” At Damascus Ananias, a pupil of Jesus Christ is sent by Jesus so that Saul may receive his

sight, receive the Holy Spirit and be immersed in the name of the Lord Jesus the Christ for remission of sins, i.e. what he must do. Thus Saul experienced the reality of the body of Christ. In this way Christ can be truly the head of His body in a locality, as each member submits to the leading of the Spirit, hears His voice and obeys Him.

Jesus asked the Pharisees; “The immersion of John; is it from heaven or of man?” When we experience a ministry which is from heaven, and therefore not of man, we can confidently submit to it, knowing that we are submitting to the Spirit in that ministry. We are getting back here to the local body of Christ, and the ministry gifts within.

So, we can now be taught by the Holy Spirit, and we follow his instruction when we obey him in what he tells us to do. What pupil is it who hears what his teacher says he should do and then ignores him or disobeys? The Spirit is patient and gracious, but he will not strive with men forever! Having been born into a new life of the Spirit and receiving the deposit of the same Spirit it is up to us to listen to him earnestly and obey him. By obeying the Holy Spirit we will continue to abide in Christ and so bear much fruit.

John 8:31; Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If you continue in my word, then you are my disciples indeed; And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

The alternative is to stop hearing him, stop abiding in him and withering up like those dried branches Jesus mentioned in the passage we looked at in John’s gospel. I have to confess that I have seen both in those around me and that I have experienced some of both states in myself. Abide in me and I in you (a mutually fulfilling state.) relates to asking daily for our daily bread, i.e. to be filled with the Holy Spirit for that day.

We have a clear and solemn warning sounded in the letter to the Hebrews; 3:1 to 4:14. Remember that this is written to those who have heard the message of repentance and remission of sins by faith in the Lord Jesus the Christ. The message is that we should be careful to keep believing on Jesus, keep listening to Jesus, keep obeying Jesus, and keep ourselves un-spotted by sin. This is realised through being filled with the Holy Spirit, not by human effort.

Hebrews 3:1 Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, partners in a heavenly calling, take note of Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess, who is faithful to the one who appointed him, as Moses was also in God’s house. For he has come to deserve greater glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house deserves greater honour than the house itself! For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken. But the Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house. We are of his house, if in fact we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope we take pride in. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Oh, that today you would listen as he speaks! “Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of testing in the wilderness. “There your fathers tested me and tried me,

and they saw my works for forty years. “Therefore, I became provoked at that generation and said, ‘Their hearts are always wandering and they have not known my ways.’ “As I swore in my anger, ‘They will never enter my rest!’” See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has an evil, unbelieving heart that forsakes the living God. But exhort yourselves each day, as long as it is called “Today,” that none of you may become hardened by sin’s deception. For we have become partners with Christ, if in fact we hold our initial confidence firm until the end. As it says, “Oh, that today you would listen as he speaks! Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.” For which ones heard and rebelled? Was it not all who came out of Egypt under Moses’ leadership? And against whom was God provoked for forty years? Was it not those who sinned, whose dead bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear they would never enter into his rest, except those who were disobedient? So we see that they could not enter because of unbelief. Therefore we must be wary that, while the promise of entering his rest remains open, none of you may seem to have come short of it. For we had good news proclaimed to us just as they did. But the message they heard did them no good, since they did not join in with those who heard it in faith. For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my anger, ‘They will never enter my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For

he has spoken somewhere about the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works,” but to repeat the text cited earlier: “They will never enter my rest!” Therefore it remains for some to enter it, yet those to whom it was previously proclaimed did not enter because of disobedience. So God again ordains a certain day, “Today,” speaking through David after so long a time, as in the words quoted before, “O, that today you would listen as he speaks! Do not harden your hearts.” For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken afterwards about another day. Consequently a Sabbath rest remains for the people of God. For the one who enters God’s rest has also rested from his works, just as God did from his own works. Thus we must make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by following the same pattern of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing even to the point of dividing soul from spirit, and joints from marrow; it is able to judge the desires and thoughts of the heart. And no creature is hidden from God, but everything is naked and exposed to his eyes to whom we must render an account.

Am I then a disciple/pupil of Jesus, the Lord and King? Thanks to his mercy and grace this is what I have been called by him to be and what I am. Looking to Jesus, the one who begins and the one who completes our faith. By being pupils of the Christ in reality, through being daily filled with the Holy Spirit and listening for His voice, we can fully enter into the God given organism which is the assembly of the saints, as commenced on the day of Pentecost.

CHAPTER 3: WILL THE REAL SAINTS PLEASE STAND UP?

Daniel 2:33 “It’s feet partly of iron and partly of clay.”

“As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.” Nebuchadnezzar’s dream as explained in Daniel chapter 2. We are going to look at this image as a type of the history of the saints.

Indisputably a fundamental, and to some a seemingly insurmountable problem is in the mixture of those born of the Spirit with those who are not. Personally I have never yet encountered a local group that was not a mixture of iron and clay, that is, those born of the Spirit and those still unregenerate. As this is in accordance with prophecy it should not be a surprise. However the fact that it is prophesied does not mean that we should just accept the situation. The point of prophecy is to warn us so that we can take appropriate action.

Nebuchadnezzar saw a great image - Daniel chapter 2 verses 31 onwards. It’s head was of fine gold, it’s chest and arms of silver, it’s belly and sides of bronze, it’s legs of iron, it’s feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. It starts off at the head of gold. Gold in the scriptures is often a metaphor for the qualities of God. The head is at the highest point, in the heavens as it were. The feet are of clay, a metaphor for man and at the lowest point, planted on the earth.

Ideally we should be gold, like the head of the statue, or at least silver or bronze. Still, iron is better than nothing. Nebuchadnezzar’s statue is paralleled obviously in the succession of empires and perhaps not so obviously in the history of the saints. The early pupils of Christ spread through the Jewish dispersion from Portugal to Kerala in south-western India within a generation. Their faith and fellowship was refined in the furnace of intense and often violent persecution. They were documented as taking practical care of one another, gathering in homes to share simple meals in honour of their Lord, having resolute faithfulness: Gold.

After the death of the Apostles and their peers and with an easing of persecution in some areas the saints were still in good shape, but not as at the first. All the dangers warned about by Paul and the other Apostles in their letters to the local assemblies were having an effect. Community life was becoming polluted with organisational structure and religious tendencies: Silver.

By 110A.D. faith in the Christ was becoming almost popular. Not surprisingly as the world was then full of superstitious and religious people and faith in Christ was starting to look like just another superior religion. Philosophers and statesmen were joining in and starting to make subtle ‘improvements’. Around this time a letter from Ignatius, a monarchical bishop of Antioch, shows that already the saints were being organised and dominated in ways contrary to the principles and life of the kingdom. The emergence of the rule of the local assembly by a single overseer instead of joint care by a group of elders reveals the effects of growing institutionalism and diminished listening to the Holy Spirit: Bronze.

We then come to a period where we have ‘Christianity’ the world religion. By 150A.D. most assemblies are organised under monarchical overseers with a clergy class distinguished from the laity class. The operation of the gifts of the Spirit was by this time becoming rare. Those who did not have these gifts operating within their assembly were saying that they may have just been given for the apostle’s time. Community was formalised, the celebration of the Lord’s Table was becoming a formal ritual and under organisational control: Iron.

With the Emperor Constantine around 330AD we arrive at the final stages in the imagery, both in the temporal and spiritual realms. The new religion is by now full of ritual and superstition, associated closely with the emergence of clergy - laity distinctions, filling the vacuum left by the exclusion of the Holy Spirit. The religious section has succeeded in bringing in elements from the Old Testament including a separate priesthood with rites, robes and artefacts. Immersion in water becomes a rite of initiation into a ‘Church’, it’s form changed deliberately from ‘in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins’ to the enforced ‘in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit’; omitting any reference to the remission of sins which is through faith in the name

of Jesus Christ. It was now viewed as best done as near as possible to the initiates death, since it was thought to be a waste of the remission offered by baptism to then go and sin again afterwards. In line with this thinking Constantine himself refrained from being immersed until just hours before his death. Instead of being pupils of Jesus by the Spirit's leading, mere formal membership and learning of catechisms. Breaking of bread house to house becomes reduced to a ritual ceremony, supervised by a 'priestly caste' in a 'holy' place. Prayers become organised and predictable. Instead of individuals each being taught by the Holy Spirit, the elevation of selected 'Holy Writ' and tradition/interpretation taught by the emerging priestly caste as the prime source of instruction. The downward slide from the new covenant of the spirit, back to old covenant ways of the flesh, is complete. Constantine for his own political ends 'Christianises' pagan religion and forces it on unwilling, conscientious believers. The world religion of 'Christianity' is first recognised and then intermittently promoted by the state as the official religion, followed by more times of persecution and paganisation, followed finally by official endorsement and enforcement. Pagan priests are converted and go overnight from serving at the altars of heathen gods to being ordained as 'priests' in official 'consecrated' buildings with Old Testament style altars, holy artefacts and robes: Iron mixed with Clay.

From this point on the saints are clearly mixed up. Pupils of Jesus born of the Spirit (in the minority) are involved with people at all levels who are not born of the Spirit. Sometimes the true believers were overwhelmed numerically by the unregenerate as it was not the Holy Spirit who was doing the adding. Neither were folk being added to the Body of the Christ, but to a human religious system. The two legs of the statue can be seen to mirror the two halves of the Roman Empire, which divide and become effectively separate empires a little while after this time. The Latin speaking west eventually has its capital in Rome and the Greek speaking east takes Constantinople as its capital city. The religion of Christianity divides also, with Rome becoming the base for the western Catholic half and Constantinople (Istanbul) becoming the base for the eastern Orthodox half. This remains so to this day, with the western arm largely ignorant of the Orthodox arm in the East. In case you are getting depressed, the next big thing will be the return of Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords (the stone cut out without hands) and all the above will pass away.

We can learn from the rapid spiritual decline of the saints from the Golden Apostolic Age to the sad state by 300A.D. We should not be surprised at the present state of the saints or of the tendency to slip backwards rather than to make progress. To go backwards we need do nothing. The unregenerate and our own flesh will take over, organising and controlling affairs. History shows that to make progress spiritually we will need to arise, acquit ourselves like men and fight with everything God equips us with. Very rarely, if ever, has a genuine move of the Spirit lasted from one generation over into the next. We should accept no substitutes for having the life of Christ within us, by the Spirit manifested outwardly in community with the saints in the local body. Maintained through constant prayer, sharing in the Lord's Table house to house, abiding in the Holy Spirit.

Where what is perceived as the Body of Christ is in distinctive and divided institutions, then the threshold over which one enters will be one of conformity to the minimum requirements of each particular group's culture and rules.

What do I mean by this? The saints where I live in Tyneside are scattered, mostly among numerous distinctive religious entities each having their own venue for public meetings. Just as each has its own venue they all have their own style of public meeting and standard of what passes for a good member. What might be considered a good Roman Catholic might not be considered a good Baptist or a good Pentecostal, and vice versa. To enter and become an acceptable member of any of these organisations one would have to meet the differing criteria of each. To become a good Roman Catholic I would need to accept various doctrines and customs peculiar to that body, many of which may be offensive to members of some other body. To be considered a good Pentecostal I would need to adopt another set of beliefs and practices, many of which would in turn be offensive to other groups. And so on. With some places the only requirement is to come along!

In contrast perhaps it would be helpful to imagine the apostle Paul arriving at say, Ephesus and looking for the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. He would be looking for a people, not for a building. He perhaps would

begin by asking his fellow tent makers if they knew any who belonged to the Way, that is, pupils of the Christ. Or he may even inquire at the synagogue! Having found one brother he would have found them all. That brother would be connected directly or indirectly at a personal level with the whole assembly of saints in that city, through being in practical community with them.

The kingdom of God is entered through receiving a revelation of Jesus the Door, by faith in His name, upon repentance, being born of water (baptism into the name of Jesus for remission of sins) and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit into a new spiritual life. It is much easier for a rich man to enter a religious organisation than to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is easier for any of us to join an institution than to take up our cross daily and follow Jesus, continuing in the Spirit, putting to death our flesh and denying our own souls.

And unfortunately many of us do enter the religious organisations. So do many not so rich and many folks who are disadvantaged in some way. We all may find some comfort in our attendance and affiliation to these many and various groups. Calling them churches and fellowships does not help members of the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many who are born of the Spirit are led to incorrectly think of these as legitimate expressions of the kingdom of God and not as the purely human manifestations they are. Hence the divided and mixed assembly is truly mixed up. It is easy to lose sight of the fact that the kingdom of God is about those who were not a people (nation) becoming now the people of God. Where the horizon is littered with many and various groups and buildings it is these that impact on our minds and corrupt our perception of the Body of Christ and the kingdom of God - His Holy Nation.

After being immersed in the Holy Spirit I started attending a 'church' straightaway as 'it was there' and I knew no better. The nice people who told me about Jesus were attending there also and told me that this is what God wants! So is this what God really wants? Is this from heaven or of man? Is this Churchianity the new wineskin? Or is it the Old Wineskin?

Why Go To Church?

This part is written in love to all those who have been born from above, not of the will of man, nor of the flesh, but of the Spirit. To those who have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the powers of the coming age. To those called to be the sons of God through faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus, the Christ. To all who would lay aside their own lives, that they might know Him, and the fellowship of His sufferings, and His resurrection life.

Nothing written here is intended for anyone else, nor to offend.

Going to Church is not for those to whom this is written.

Jesus never told anyone to 'go to church'.

He did say; beware of the leaven of the scribes and Pharisees, which is hypocrisy – religious play acting - pretence. He also warned, beware of the leaven of Herod – love of worldly riches, authority and status.

Going to church in some form is a universal expression and component of many world religions.

It may not always be called 'going to church'. It may be called;

'Going to mass.'

'Attending church.'

'Church membership.'

'Temple worship.'

'Communion service.'

'Celebration'.

It can be observed in most major world religions, even if it is called something else.

Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism etc all have their own way of 'going to church'.

Evangelical Christianity is obviously the one that presents the greatest danger and snare to the saints.

An enemy has done this.

The prophetic example in the scriptures of this strategy of Satan is in **1 Kings 11:28**; And the man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valour: and Solomon seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph. And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they two were alone in the field: And Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces: And he said to Jeroboam, Take ten pieces: for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to you: (But he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel:) Because that they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways, to do *that which is* right in my eyes, and *to keep* my statutes and my judgments, as *did* David his father. Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand: but I will make him prince all the days of his life for David my servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept my commandments and my statutes: But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it to you, *even* ten tribes. And to his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light always before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there. And I will take you, and you shall reign according to all that your soul desires, and shall be king over Israel. And it shall be, if you will hearken to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do *that is* right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with you, and build you a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel to you. And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever.

Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam. And Jeroboam arose, and fled into Egypt, unto Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon. And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him to the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only. And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah, with the tribe of Benjamin, an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. But the word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, Speak to Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me. They hearkened therefore to the word of the LORD, and returned to depart, according to the word of the LORD. Then Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim, and dwelt there; and went out from thence, and built Peniel. And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, *even* unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.

Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves *of* gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin: for the people went *to worship* before the one, *even* to Dan. And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi. And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like the feast that *is* in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month, *even* in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense. And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus says the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon you shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon you, and men's bones shall be burnt upon you. And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This *is* the sign which the LORD hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that *are* upon it shall be poured out.

So Jeroboam was the first king of the ten tribes, over whom he reigned twenty-two years (B.C. 976-945). He was the son of a widow of Zereda, and while still young was promoted by Solomon to be chief superintendent of the “burnden”, i.e., of the bands of forced labourers. He fled to Egypt **1Ki 11:29-40** where he remained for a length of time under the protection of Shishak I. On the death of Solomon, because of Solomon’s apostasy in turning towards the foreign gods of his illicit wives, the ten tribes, having revolted, sent to invite Jeroboam to become their king. The conduct of Rehoboam favoured the designs of Jeroboam, and he was accordingly proclaimed “king of Israel” **1Ki 12:1-20** He rebuilt and fortified Shechem as the capital of his kingdom. He at once adopted means to perpetuate the division thus made between the two parts of the kingdom, and erected at Dan and Bethel, the two extremities of his kingdom, “golden calves – worship aids,” which he set up as symbols of Jehovah, enjoining the people not any more to go up to worship at Jerusalem, but to bring their offerings to the shrines he had erected. He effectively created two further alternative places of worship, one at Bethel – the house of God- sounds a good place to have a worship centre, doesn’t it? The other at Dan, in the extreme north, so that the Israelites could choose the place of worship that was most convenient. As the Levites weren’t going to play along with this rebellion against the clear commands of Jehovah he opened up the priesthood to any who felt they had a vocation to serve at the new altars.

Jeroboam also invented his own feasts to Jehovah at times of his own setting. Thus he became distinguished as the man “who made Israel to sin.” This policy was followed by all the succeeding kings of Israel. While he was engaged in offering incense at Bethel, a prophet from Judah appeared before him with a warning message from the Lord. Attempting to arrest the prophet for his bold words of defiance, his hand was “dried up,” and the altar before which he stood was rent asunder. At his urgent entreaty his “hand was restored him again” **1Ki 13:1-6 9** compare with **2Ki 23:15** but the miracle made no abiding impression on him. His reign was one of constant war with the house of Judah. He died soon after his son Abijah **1Ki 14:1-20**. Effectively Jeroboam, God’s appointed King of the 10 tribes of Israel, had laid a trap for the people of God, to draw them into disobedience and idolatry, to see if they would obey God or just ‘worship’ anyplace, anyhow. Jesus gave His word on the whole matter in **John 4.19**;

The woman said to him, Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain (Samaria); and you say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus said to her, Woman, believe me, the hour comes, when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship you know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such to worship him. God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth. The woman said unto him, I know that Messiah comes, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus said unto her, I that speak to you am *he*.

Very soon after the passing of all the original apostles of the Christ, most of the saints who had began gloriously in the Holy Spirit ended up by continuing, going on in the flesh. The style of our going on in the flesh may vary tremendously, from pseudo Messianic liturgical leanings to hyper-rationalizing the scriptures, with a wide spectrum in-between.

Eventually the pagan emperor Constantine declared the by now very fleshly religion of ‘Christianity’ to be the official religion of the Roman Empire. He then made it his business to see to it that this religion was viable by attempts at homogenising it and ensuring it had all the trappings of a world religion, with temples, altars, priests, ritual, dressing up, feasts, holy days, creeds and new moons. This politically motivated strategy is well documented as a universally occurring way of unifying a state. Right down to the Inquisition, the English Church Laws of Henry VIII, Islam, and other manifestations in all ages and cultures.

As God is the God of heaven and earth, none of this is outside His providence, just as in the case of Jeroboam. It happened to God’s chosen because of their apostasy – rebellion.

Nevertheless God has always kept a remnant of those who worship Him in the Spirit and in the Truth.

Very often they have been mixed up with the prevailing culture they happened to have been born into. But usually they eventually ‘came forth out from among them’. Often with, or through, great suffering, persecution and loss.

Going to Church though, has always endured as the state approved mode of religion, even if it has been ‘tweaked’ from time to time. The prince of this world loves to have it so.

And so 'Going to church' is always there as a stumbling block to those who desire to know and serve the Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and the Truth. It presents itself as harmless, indeed, as beneficial. It can also appear as a relatively convenient and easy way to 'worship' God or to 'fellowship' with brothers. The lack of a clear visible Holy Spirit anointed alternative is also a major challenge to us all at this present time. As 'going to church' is everywhere it can easily be viewed as the only viable model for the disciples of the Lord Jesus, the Anointed King. It is not.

So, what is the alternative?

The alternative is to repent of lukewarmness, of going for the easy, the cheap, the attractive, the socially acceptable, the normal rather than seeking first (preferring) the Kingdom of God, which is in the Spirit.

Why did I mentioned at the beginning that 'This is written in love to all those who have been born from above, not of the will of man, nor of the flesh, but of the Spirit. To those who have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the powers of the coming age. To those called to be the sons of God through faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus, the Christ. To all who would lay aside their own lives, that they might know Him, and the fellowship of His sufferings, and His resurrection life.'?

Simply because unless and until one is born of water and of the Holy Spirit one cannot see the Kingdom of God. It is not apparent in any way. (**John 3**) We remain in the dark. In this case it really doesn't matter which religious or church games people get involved in.

So if we have indeed received of the Spirit of Christ and so are His, if we who have tasted of the powers of the coming age, we can prefer the Kingdom of God. We've had a taste of it. But we have to prefer it to the point of mourning, fasting, craving the reality of immersion in the Spirit day by day. And not accept the sop or substitute of 'Going to Church' religious role playing. When we are immersed in the Spirit, we are immersed in the Christ, Jesus; in His death and in His resurrection to new eternal (quality) life. (**Romans 6**) Any day we are not immersed in the Spirit, we are continuing (going on) in the flesh. Now we know that the flesh wars with the spirit. We become like the dog returning to its vomit, the washed pig back to wallowing in the mire, very quickly. At least this has been my personal experience. And I've witnessed it in others I've known and loved. But we have to pull down those altars that are not of God's making.

We shouldn't sign up for this substitute form of 'worship' which is in effect idolatry.

Brothers and sisters, let's leave the things of childhood behind and grow up into the Christ who is the Head. Knowing Jesus is worth it. I'm not sorry that He got me out of the 'Church Games' scenario alive! I am so grateful.

And, when we are out of this pattern of going to church religion, we can become motivated to seek out our brothers and sisters. The love of God shared abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit in us looks for sheep to feed, lambs to care for, feet to wash.

The alternative that Christ Jesus provides is a hundred mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and homes, both in this life and in the age to come!

Mark 10:29 And Jesus answered and said, Truly I say to you, There is no man that has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.

But all of this, out of the fruit of the Spirit, not of our own will or devising. If we abide in Jesus, and His words abide in us we will bear much fruit. It is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord.

John 16:8 "When he (the Spirit) has come he will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement." So Jesus informed his followers prior to the outpouring of the Promise of the Father, for which he, Jesus, came. When questioned about whether an individual is or is not born of the Spirit we may be coy about giving a definitive judgement, as if it is not our responsibility to know who are and who are not our brothers. The way to know if someone is born of the Spirit is by getting to know him or her! Sounds obvious doesn't it? Hence the importance of genuine community.

But if we do not know who is our brother, how can we obey Christ's new commandment, that we love one another as he loved us? How can we shepherd sheep and wolves together? How can light have fellowship with darkness? We would be disappointed at not receiving the love of the Spirit shed abroad in the hearts of those who have not got this experience. We would have expectations of the unsaved, which could not be fulfilled.

May it not be that we are coy about judging who is and who is not born of the Spirit because we are coy about the message of repentance and remission of sins in the name of the Lord Jesus, the Christ of God?

John 3:16; "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." None of the distinctive Christian groups would argue with this but this is not the whole message.

Lots of people believe in Jesus to some degree but do not have eternal life. True? George Fox referred to them as 'professors'. These are distinct from 'possessors'. How can they be saved unless they believe the message of salvation? How can they hear all the good message of God's free offer of salvation unless someone share it with them? How can the preachers preach unless they are sent with the clear message of repentance and remission of sins through the name of Jesus the Christ? An ambiguous or compromised message learnt from men leads to an ambiguous or compromised people. If the truth is hid is it not hidden from those who are perishing? How can it be the whole message of faith in the power of God if not in demonstration and power of the Holy Spirit? How can it result in faith in the name of Jesus if there are no signs done in the name of Jesus?

The reverse is also true. The contemporary message of God's offer may be ambiguous because the saints are ambiguous. One will not accommodate the other. That is; a mixed group will reject a clear cut message of the opportunity of remission of sins in the name of Jesus and a miraculous new birth in the Holy Spirit as proclaimed by the Holy Spirit through Peter on the day of Pentecost; - as being the purpose of Jesus' death and resurrection. Also the proclaiming of God's offer of an actual new birth when Christ immerses the repentant believer in the Holy Spirit will divide the mixed assembly into those with and those without this experience and the resultant fruit of sanctification – separation from the world; and justification - righteousness.

History and current events in any group where the Spirit is moving bear this out. The Spirit brings a sword and we hate to see people upset.

A proclamation of God's offer of salvation based on the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for our sin which was shown to be accepted by God through God raising him from the dead; of repentance; of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission – blotting out - of sin; and an expectation of being immersed in the Holy Spirit as the start of a new life; where there is the daily possibility of being full of the Holy Spirit in a way that can be discerned by oneself and others.

This would be seen by many to be trite, offensive and frankly, unbelievable. And here is the crux of the matter, unbelievable. For without faith we cannot be born of the Spirit. No matter how nice, religious, sincere, loyal, hardworking, honest, good, kind, dependable, wise, intelligent, knowledgeable, searching, inquiring, devout in prayer, fervent in singing praises to God, emotional, attentive, articulate, regular in attendance at public gatherings of a religious nature or even skilled in leading them and taking part. Without faith that obtains the Gift of God which he offers - nothing.

In our desire to see numbers grow at a group we may settle for a formula which only prompts folks to 'ask Jesus into your heart.' If they get to that stage we may then eventually advise them to be immersed at the next 'baptismal service' instead of teaching that Jesus commands all who desire to follow him to repent and be immersed in water in his name for the remission of their sins straight away. As a separate matter some folks, depending on what sort of enterprise it is, will be told about the immersion in the Holy Spirit, almost as an 'extra' to give power to live the sort of life God wants his children to live.

With the Good News split up into these various parts is it any wonder that the level of a true experience of salvation in those who hear this ‘message in instalments’ is so varied. As the record shows of those believers in Ephesus who perhaps had only heard the message according to Apollos before he was corrected, we generally only receive that which we believe; and we can only believe that which we have heard. These particular believers in Ephesus had not so much as heard that there was a Holy Spirit, nor that remission of sins was in the name of Jesus, so how could they receive the Holy Spirit when they believed? **Acts 19**.

Having said this however all preaching of Jesus the Christ is to be applauded. By the grace of God many come to faith in Jesus in all manner of circumstances and under a very wide variety of preaching.

Wanting to be ‘ecumenical’ we may say that the precise form of message taught is not important. The evangelical version which promotes asking Jesus to come into your heart, or giving your life to Jesus, while not mentioning immersion in water in the name of Jesus and more importantly ignoring the experience of the receiving of the gift of the Holy Spirit cannot be viewed as correct. If it is then Apollos had no need to be instructed ‘more accurately’ by Aquila and Priscilla. See Acts chapters eighteen and nineteen – he had only been immersed in John’s baptism of repentance for remission of sin. The gospel he preached was what he had learnt from men. In the Greek text, by catechism. It says a lot for Apollos, an eloquent and learned man who was already fervently and skilfully teaching that Jesus was the Christ, that he was eager to learn more accurately the Way as shown by Aquila and Priscilla.

The commandment to be immersed in water in Jesus’ name upon repentance and faith in Jesus Christ is the command with a promise way to receive the gift of God; remission of sins and a new birth in the Holy Spirit. Faith without obedience is wishful thinking. Faith with obedience obtains the promises of God. Faith and obedience go hand in hand, as do unbelief and disobedience. God does not recognise faith without obedience. As also James wrote; “Faith without works is dead.” If the message is presented with the omission of this integral commandment then we rob the hearer of the opportunity to put their faith in the name of Jesus into obedient action and the free gift of remission of sins.

Sadly the good news of the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ would appear to be very rarely heard in modern Western ‘evangelical’ circles. The apostle Paul declared that the message he preached was not received from men, but by revelation from Jesus Christ. He also stated that if any man preaches another gospel to this, let that preacher be accursed. This problem may stem from the fact that few are sent from God with the message of salvation. John the Baptist was a man sent from God. Accordingly his message and baptism was from heaven and true. Saul and Barnabus were chosen and sent by God with the message of salvation that was by revelation of Jesus Christ.

Peter did not ask those who heard him on the day of Pentecost to ‘give your heart to Jesus’. Paul did not ask anyone to put their hands up and go to the front where they would get a leaflet! God’s way throughout the Old and New Testaments is to present a blessing together with a command to be obeyed by faith.

Jesus plainly taught; “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven.” Also he said; “You are my pupils/disciples if you do what I command you.”

What Peter did proclaim to those hearing him was; **Acts 2:38**; “Repent, and let everyone of you be immersed in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” The result was that those who gladly received his word were immersed; and that day about three thousand were added to the assembly.

Paul clarifies this when he writes: **1Cor 6:9** Don’t you know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit

the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

1 Corinthians 12; 13 “For by one Spirit we were all immersed into one body, - whether Jews or Greeks, - whether slaves or free, - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” The immersion in the Spirit is what makes us part of the body of Christ, the Assembly of the First Born. This qualifies and enables us to actively participate in the local assembly of the saints.

When Peter said; “to your children, and all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call,” I get the impression that this basic message is meant for all generations, throughout the world. To remove any part surely is to sabotage God’s word.

Is it not lamentable that immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ has been reduced to a doctrine to be argued about rather than a simple clear command to be obeyed on route to receiving remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit? History shows that superstition and philosophy accomplished very early on this act of sabotage against the simplicity of the good message of salvation. In most western organisations the commandment to be immersed in the name of Jesus has been extracted from the message and put into the attic of theological curios. Or replaced with a liturgical act more with a view to connecting the one immersed into membership of a specific religious organization or denomination than for remission of sins.

Where this has been removed completely from the practice of the saints it has become a theme for discussion and attempts to understand its meaning and implications. In other places it has been contorted into a device for initiating new members into their particular denomination or group. It can be just something that has to be done in order to progress within some organisations.

The enemy has scored a major success in most areas with the removal or obscuring of this clear command of Jesus from preaching and sharing the message of faith in the Christ and the power of the name of Jesus. It is on a par with removing circumcision from the old covenant God made with Abraham and his descendents.

Repentance and water immersion in the name of Jesus Christ is the response God looks for on hearing the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. But this has to be part of the message that is shared. He has promised to respond to this obedience of faith with remission of sins and the immersion in the Holy Spirit. I am sure Peter was thinking of this when he said to the counsel; **Acts 5:32**; “The Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.” He also continues giving the Holy Spirit to those who continue obeying him but we have to start here!

Personally I dare not now share the good news of Jesus the Christ without including the command to repent and to be immersed in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins and linking this with the receiving of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. As a result I have seen people immersed, among other places, in their own and other folk’s bathtubs, as this seemed the most sensible and convenient way at the time. The purpose of repentance and immersion is obedience to Christ’s commandment to receive remission of sins and to be able to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, not to put on a show or to fill a liturgical slot.

It is a good thing for us that God is not bound and is gracious. In his mercy I was born again of the Holy Spirit before I was immersed in water. When I was eventually ‘baptised’ it was not as part of the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. Even though it was in a ‘Pentecostal church’ I belonged to at the time it was more like Constantine’s formula and without Christ’s authority.

God is exceeding anxious that we should enter into the kingdom and seems to make many exceptions where the message has lost its integrity. In the case of Cornelius in Acts chapter ten, those hearing Peter were all received the gift of the Holy Spirit before being immersed in water in the name of the Lord Jesus. Peter only had to state; **Acts 10:42** “And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He (Jesus) who was

ordained by God *to be* Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.”

God’s grace is not to be presumed upon however, and the message didn’t change as a result of what happened in the house of Cornelius. Our faith needs all the help it can get and hearing the simple command of Jesus to be immersed gives the formative faith of the hearer something to reach out and be obedient in. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” To Jesus, hearing meant obeying.

There is a reverse logic prevalent in many evangelical circles. It goes something like this;

“I have asked The Lord Jesus to be my Saviour; therefore I am born again; therefore I have been immersed in the Holy Spirit.” While this may give intellectual comfort, the correct order should be;

“ I have had my sins washed away through being baptised in the name of Jesus and I have been immersed in the Holy Spirit; therefore I am born from above; Jesus is my Saviour!”

So if we are going to start making judgements we had better start with ourselves! The hardest place, but the easiest really. After all, who should know better than ourselves whether or not there was a specific initial experience when we were tangibly born from above as the Holy Spirit came upon us and we were filled with a joy unspeakable; instantly changed by the power of God. With power to be righteous that was not our own, but given. With joy that was not totally logical and was from deep within, springing up like a well. Hallelujah! I remember it like it was now! (Here I stop for a brief spell of leaping, dancing and praising. Feel free to join me if in a suitable place and the experience is yours.) Praise God for his unspeakable gift! But it is good for us to examine ourselves, to see if we are ‘in the faith’. Not religion, but following Jesus by faith in Him, daily asking Him to fill us with the Holy Spirit.

However, if this perhaps is foreign to you, if you have to struggle to identify in any way with this, then make a judgement. This is not written to condemn you. This is written so that you might not miss out on the gift of God, which he bought for you with the blood of his Son Jesus. He was anointed similarly with the Holy Spirit when he came out of the river Jordan after being immersed by John in a baptism of repentance for remission of sins; who declared him to be the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world!

God declared him at that moment to be his only begotten Son in whom he was well pleased. When he immerses you in the Spirit he declares the same to you, that you are his child in whom he is well pleased. It doesn’t half cheer you up. Just as Jesus began his ministry straight after this experience we can start straightaway to serve the local body of Christ.

Having been out of formal religious organisations since 1982 I have come to the conclusion that the only way I can know if someone is truly born of the Spirit is if that person loves some other brother or sister with the love of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said, “by this shall all men know that you are my pupils, that you have love one for another.” Community ‘Koinonia’ in the Greek; is the way that Christ in us is expressed and experienced within the local assembly.

We are all by nature clay, of the earth, but we can become as gold, transformed by the power of the indwelling Spirit of Christ. We need to know who are our brothers and sisters in Christ so that we can become knit together with them in love. Community among the company of pupils in a locality exposes our clay-flesh and reveals the Spirit within us.

CHAPTER 4: "ONE IS YOUR LEADER"

Jesus spoke these words to the twelve apostles who obviously were going to be leaders. In **Matthew 23:8** He said; "But you, do not be called 'Teacher'; (Rabbi in Hebrew) because one is your Teacher (Didaskalos in Greek), and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for one is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called leaders (rulers), because one is your Leader (Ruler - (kathygite in Greek)), the Christ (Anointed King)." Also he said. "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me." The word Greek word kathygite translated as 'master' in the KJV literally means 'Seated One', in the sense that the seat 'Kathedra' is a throne, the place of rule and authority. Starting at the end of Matthew chapter 22, Jesus has much to say about seats and sitting and directing. He quotes **Psalm 110:1**; 'Sit at my right hand until I put all your enemies under your feet', emphasising that Messiah would take the seat at the right hand of the majesty on high, and rule. He talks about the Pharisees sitting in Moses' seat, and the authority associated with this.

The twelve had grown up in a religious environment where there were clearly leaders and rulers in the synagogues and among the priesthood and teachers of the law. This is natural and all society operates in these ways. However the kingdom of God is different. It is in fact God's kingdom, not the province of men.

We can learn from the account of the nation of Israel in the Book of Judges.

After the twelve tribes of Israel had settled in Canaan there was no king but they were regulated by judges appointed by God. These were a very assorted set of characters from every tribe and included women. They were mostly ordinary people chosen by God who anointed them with the Holy Spirit to judge and deliver his people. This was in contrast to the priesthood, which was a hereditary institution limited to a line of adult males from one tribe alone out of the twelve. In **Judges 2:16** we read; "Then the Lord raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them." Then at regular intervals. "And the Lord raised up so and so."

Even at this time the people of Israel displayed their longing for an established monarchy by asking Gideon to be their king. **Judges 8:22**; "Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian." They mistakenly gave the credit for their deliverance to the man God used, instead of to God. Gideon had it right though and replied; "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you."

Gideon wasn't dead long before the men of Shechem made Abimelech his son king, a reign lasting three years, commencing with the murder of all Abimelech's brothers and ending in civil war.

Samuel was the last God appointed judge and when he was old he made the mistake of making his sons judges to carry on after him. Perhaps in desperation he looked to provide himself, instead of looking to God to provide judges to rule Israel. Even he had failed to get the message that it was the Lord who raised up whom he wanted as judge. His sons were crooks and soon the elders of Israel came to Samuel and demanded that he "make us a king to judge us like all the nations." **1Samuel 8:5**.

Israel continually hankered after a king so as to be like the neighbouring nations. They desired a man to lead them in a settled, organised fashion and not to have to trust God to supply a judge as He saw fit. Far better a settled dynasty so that you knew where you were and where the next king was coming from.

It grieved God that Israel had rejected him in favour of a system which put the responsibility for his people on a man rather than Him. They had indeed become like the rest of the nations. God said to Samuel; **1Samuel 8:7** "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them."

Strong words. God was not indifferent to this rejection. He is not indifferent to our rejection either when we put our trust in the leaders we choose or that we ordain or accept, instead of leaving it to the Holy Spirit to operate through His gifts as He chooses. God selected Saul, a choice specimen who was head and shoulders above his fellows. But this best that was available from the ranks of men failed to defend the nation from its enemies.

David was anointed king as a type of the Messiah (Anointed King Saviour) who would come and save His people in the manner of the judges that the nation had rejected. The Messiah would be rejected also in His time.

The theme of folks looking to men for leadership and deliverance continues in the Gospels. Here the crowds hail Jesus as he makes his triumphant entry into Jerusalem riding on the foal of an ass. The crowd cried out. "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel." They wanted at that time to make Jesus their king. At last we may think, they have got it right. But Jesus knew better. He knew their motives, He knew what was in the heart of man. At the time of his trial the same crowd cried out; "We will not have this man to rule over us, we have no king but Caesar." As he told Pilate; "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were my servants would fight. But now my kingdom is not from here." Jesus did not come to be a king after the fashion of human kings. He was truly King of Israel as he admitted to Pilate. Indeed he was crucified with this charge written above him: "The King of the Jews." The point is that even Jesus, the rightful King, did not come to be made an earthly king by the will of men.

One of the major faults of an established monarchy is that succession is automatic. An heir who could be totally unsuitable could easily succeed a good king. To ensure there wasn't going to be a revolution each time this happened the divine rights of kings was a major part of the propaganda and mystique surrounding these exalted and most special of families. So you could have an infant already assuming the title of heir apparent while his future character and ability were completely unknown. The only thing certain was that if he survived his father he would be king. To outlive his father was also the only qualification he needed. Obviously a flawed system of government that would be challenged unless you could make assertions that God had somehow appointed and ordained every heir that proceeded from the royal line; - 'the divine right of kings'. The same mystique can surround religious leaders. The reasoning can go like this; 'God wouldn't let a man or woman be a leader within the organisation unless He wanted them to be in that position.' or; 'As this person is in such a position God will surely bless them if we pray for them anyway.' The above could apply equally to religious leaders or monarchs.

A great danger in establishing a formal system of leadership in a group of believers is that when someone with genuine gifting of the Spirit for a particular function leaves, someone else is found to succeed them in their place. Then that person has to assume the previous incumbent's role. Can you spot the flesh here as opposed to the Spirit who gives gifts severally as he wills? Paul wrote "But we are those who put no confidence in the flesh." Instead we can put our trust fully in the Holy Spirit.

So Jesus warned the apostles not to put their trust in men whose breath is in their nostrils but in Him, in the heavenly Father, in the Holy Spirit. He gave the warning because all men naturally would prefer to put responsibility on men whom they can see rather than trust God whom they can't see. Also we men and women love status, recognition and vocation and are happy to go along if people call us leader, father or teacher. (Or minister, pastor, vicar, reverend, bishop, doctor, rector, apostle, etc.). Obviously the principle is what matters, not the actual titles given. It can be any title that implies special status or function within the Body of Christ. The giving and accepting of titles among the saints is a denial of the truth that all the functions of the various members are from the anointing of the Holy Spirit and subject to his will, not the will of men. As Paul wrote; **1 Corinthians 15:10**; "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace towards me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I but the grace of God which was with me." **Ephesians 2:10**; "For we are his workmanship, created in the Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." He was an apostle called to be so by God, not because men had decided to recognise him as such. In the same way all the members of the body are what they are by the grace of God and not necessarily what men appoint them to be. Paul's ministry was manifest through its fruits. The same should hold for all prophets and teachers.

A most tragic consequence of Israel insisting on a king rather than judges appointed by the Holy Spirit was that ultimately it led to the division of Israel. One group of tribes chose a different king. As there cannot be two kings of one nation, the nation was split into two camps. This never happened under judges raised up by God.

It is the same in the assemblies. In Corinth the saints were forming separate parties choosing personalities as adopted leaders. "I am of Peter"; "I am of Apollos"; "I am of Christ"; "I am of Paul." As Paul said, all the parties were wrong. They were calling them teachers contrary to the command of Christ and seeking to promote what they perceived to be their distinctive teaching. While forming groups behind figurehead leaders it wasn't the fault of those whose names were being used. They were missing the truth that the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all the saints to give us individual personal teaching as required.

Where we have one group saying; 'so and so is our Apostle' and another group saying; "Mr. X is our Apostle" you have two separate groups. True gift-men are gifts to the whole Body, in which they are connecting joints. Man appointed leaders divide the Body up into their own territories.

Disobedience to this clear command of Jesus not to call (Greek word *klizw* means praise, extol, name) men leaders is a major contributor to the division in his Body. The natural man longs for structure, routine, and systems, to know where one fits in the order of things. In the kingdom of God the structure is organic not organisational. In the Kingdom we depend on the Holy Spirit, the fountain of life springing up within us. Jesus said to Nicodemus; "The wind blows where it wills and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it is coming from and where it goes, so is everyone born of the Holy Spirit." While this may look like chaos it is actually abundant life.

Paul had much to write on this subject in his letters. He warned against submitting to men promoting themselves as having authority. It must have grieved him who had real authority from God but who never promoted or flaunted it. Instead he used authority in spiritual realms, healing the sick, casting out evil spirits, declaring the glorious good news of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus and the new birth in the Holy Spirit. He worked with his hands and provided for his own needs and for the needs of others. He went house to house serving the needs of the saints rather than just holding theatrical spectaculars for mass audiences. He was referred to by Peter as 'our beloved brother Paul'. He was an apostle, sent with the message of repentance and remission of sins in the name of Jesus with authority, appointed by Jesus not by men. However the function of apostle wasn't used as a means to justify his being made leader. He always made it plain that Jesus was the Leader, the head of every man and glorious head of the Body.

In contrast those men who did seek position and authority in the assemblies were out to make a position or career or a living by exploiting the saints.

We have gone the way of Israel. The crunch possibly came when Constantine declared 'Christianity' to be the official religion of the Roman Empire. Men brought in altars, candles, statues but worst of all human empire and control.

And we appear to never have fully recovered. All over the world folk want special buildings, special officers, special meetings still called 'services'. Special types of music! Special clothes! While some of us may relinquish the altars, candles, etcetera the last thing to go is human control.

After I was ejected from 'my church' in 1982 it took many years to get rid of all that I had taken on board during sixteen years in institutional religion. The desire for a man to take the lead and to have a program that I could be involved in was very compelling.

The first thing I was looking for was to get into a similar situation and I actually considered moving to Bradford to join the 'Covenant Church' there so that I could 'come under' an apostle! I went to see (by appointment) the local man who was considered by those at Bradford to be an apostle (at the time). God graciously allowed me an uncensored view of this man who I respected and was fond of. This convinced me that I should get my eyes and hopes off men and truly back to Jesus, the author and finisher of my faith. However there were and still are continual pressures from friends to go to esteemed men and follow them, to 'come under their ministry'. This is as opposed to experiencing the reality of the body of Christ locally. The multiple gift ministries in the body through mutual submission out of reverence to Christ.

A good friend had a spell when he suffered a mild form of epilepsy and was off work as a result for a considerable length of time. Well meaning friends advised that he should seek the help of a local 'team' who were used, apparently, by God in delivering people from such conditions. My friend Bob felt that he had nothing to lose by seeing 'the team'. Bob had expected that the lady who was designated as having the gift of discernment would discern the nature of the problem by the Holy Spirit upon meeting Bob. However they went through a form of interview with questions about Bob's past and his family's past and through the answers given to the questions it was arrived at that Bob's problem was of a spiritual nature (euphemism for evil spirit) and that he needed deliverance from such.

Accordingly another appointment was made and Bob went for 'deliverance' with the lady and the other member of the team, an admirable gentleman of considerable standing in evangelical circles. At this appointment hands were laid on him and considerable physical force was used to shake his head while loud commands were given to the 'spirit' to leave Bob. As things were not proceeding very satisfactorily Bob asked if this might not be the sort that only comes by prayer and fasting and was told that was not necessarily the case but probably the lack of success was due to Bob 'not co-operating'. At one point Bob was told that it would probably help if he'd stop seeing me!

After all the sessions were over Bob left the same as he had come. (Except for a well massaged scalp.) He had walked down the road for five minutes when the Holy Spirit quietly said to him, "Bob, when will you learn to come to me rather than to men?"

The Holy Spirit first pointed out to me the truth of the passage where Jesus says 'call no man....' when I was at an Assemblies of God General Conference in 1982 and reading my Bible in our room. What He said was, "By your traditions you make void my word." I was quite taken aback. He showed me that the traditions we observe make us blind to his word on matters that we feel are taken care of by our traditions. More on this later. The point is that God requires a response to his word. He doesn't want our approval. He demands repentance and change.

You may say with some justification; "But our pastor is a good man and God is really blessing him and our folks through him." I thank God that this is very often the case. Such was the case with David, God's chosen and anointed king, but it did not make the system that Israel had chosen the right one. God blessed Israel and later Judah with many righteous kings who sometimes turned the hearts of the people back to God.

Repentance on this matter does not mean condemning those who continue in such a fashion but in our personal defrocking of every hero and guru in our hearts. Instead turning 100% to Jesus, our Lord, King, Saviour, Teacher and Shepherd.

Unfortunately those who crave human leadership will justify it just as Israel justified having a king and indeed preferred a king to God's anointed judges even when God pointed out the disadvantages. Such will have a man to rule over them.

That God has set in the Body of Christ gifts to meet the needs of the saints is plain. These gifts are many and varied and are 'of the Spirit'. The trouble is that we often may not recognise this treasure we have in earthen vessels while seeking humanly valued and recognised 'proper' functionaries.

While the gifts of God are misrepresented the true gifts are overlooked and some poor hired guy is saddled with burdens he can't fully bear.

Shepherds can't shepherd individuals from a platform. Shepherds work out in the field where the sheep are, keeping the flock together and ensuring individuals do not get separated from the rest. The early elders were among the flock. The flock is a good picture of the real community required among the saints.

I am glad that when Elijah was taken up to heaven his mantle was left for Elisha, his successor. In the same way in the kingdom, God has set in the Body all the ministry gifts necessary for the health and growth of the Body. Sending a man to Bible College or a Seminary may make him a professional minister or 'priest' but such things are totally irrelevant in the kingdom of God.

In some ways I am reminded of episodes of “The Lone Ranger”. We look for the masked stranger to appear, do the business, and disappear. We seem to find it difficult to accept that God can use the friend we know well to accomplish his goals but are ready to accept a stranger with a good curriculum vitae. Lack of true community is the breeding ground for this syndrome, and this syndrome inhibits true community.

Is this not because we don't really believe that the Holy Spirit can use 'ordinary' people like us in his kingdom? Sure he can use us to play musical instruments, keep accounts, organise events, watch the car park etcetera but not really 'spiritual' things?

Actually I don't think he is that interested in the aforementioned activities.

The hallmark of the activities of the Spirit is love. Love building one another up, caring for and about one another. Where we can recognise the ministry of the Spirit in our brothers caring for us then it is safe for us to 'follow those who lead us by their example', that is follow their example. Where the ministry gifts have become nametags for the officials of institutions then it is deadly dangerous to encourage people to follow the example of the leaders of such institutions.

In so doing we have the clear demarcations of the divided saints.

Baptists beget Baptists.

Brethren beget Brethren.

Methodists beget Methodists.

Pentecostals beget Pentecostals.

Each after their kind.

Today the believers in each locality are clearly divided among various camps each with their own leaders appointed or ordained mostly exclusively from within each rank and after the fashion of each division.

Elders are another matter. In many ways they are parallel to the elders of Israel. In any place you will have those with wisdom, experience and understanding and of a suitable character to be referred to and to learn from. In the early days they were recognised by their peers or by the Apostles from those who met the stringent qualifications and who were apt to teach.

The only people I know who are not divided from their brethren in any of these camps are those who do not make men their leaders. As I have no appointed human leader I have no camp to demand my loyalty or to conscript me in its defence. I do however have brothers who have a call on my loyalty and defence and support. I am still a member of the body of Christ in my locality, even though it is divided and dysfunctional.

You may protest, quite reasonably, “But if we have no organisation with clearly sanctioned leaders then nothing would get done.” I have to say that there is a better way. Genuine community; with our fellow pupils of the Christ in our locality. Where we recognise the body of Christ we are guided by the Spirit into fellowship and partnership, allowing Jesus to truly be head of the body where we live.

Where we are served by brothers in the Spirit of love and follow their example then love begets love but not another denomination or sect.

We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood (all of the disciples of Jesus Christ), a holy or special nation belonging to God. The history of Israel is there so that we might learn from it. In the same way we should learn from the history of the saints.

We have a Saviour, Leader and Teacher - Jesus, God's only begotten Son. We insult Him and rob ourselves if we make some poor man or woman the one we depend on. Why choose to follow a mere man or woman when Jesus calls them blind guides?

Jesus said to Peter when he questioned him about the future of the disciple who Jesus loved, “What is that to you, you follow me.” And we are called to follow him also. The alternative is for the blind to follow the blind, or the partially sighted to follow well meaning optimists.

We have a Teacher, the Holy Spirit of Truth. For him to teach us we have to be quiet and listen to him with our spirits. When he speaks we have to act on his directions and instruction. What a thrill and a privilege it is to have the Holy Spirit for our own personal coach.

We have a Father. When we need a father to go to in any of our circumstances what a privilege to have such a Heavenly Father who loves us so much and takes an active interest in all we do and what happens to us.

We have a Shepherd, Jesus the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep and who leads us and feeds us. How good it is to trust our welfare to him who is faithful and has proved his love for us when he lay down his life in atonement for our sins.

When we are blessed by someone laying down their life for us, serving us personally, caring about and for us, then it is good to thank God for the service of such shepherds that he has set in the Body of the Christ.

Lets not substitute mere men, even wonderful men, for the I AM. With tangible community between the brethren in our localities, we can grow up out of this carnal, old covenant like, state of affairs.

CHAPTER 5: THE BIBLE AS AN ICON.

This is a very difficult subject to broach without scaring a lot of folk off. I thank God for allowing us to have the Bible available to us in our own language. It is without doubt a priceless source of blessing and has been and is being used to open hearts and minds to the great news of God's offer of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus, his appointed and anointed Saviour.

It is also obviously a source of enlightenment as to Gods agenda and ways. I have been truly blessed by the Holy Spirit as I have read its pages. You may have noticed that I have referred to it a fair bit already. However - this is the dodgy bit.

At some stages in my career as a believer the Bible has been somewhat like an icon to me. That is a religious 'relic' viewed as if it had in its own right power to lead, correct and teach etcetera.

Perhaps it would serve to compare my attitude then with the attitude of say, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Christadelphians and anyone who ultimately trusted in their understanding of what the book said and were led accordingly. Perhaps also it could be compared with that of the scribes and Pharisees in the gospels.

How this slippery and subtle demise comes about is largely due to the emphasis put on the Bible as 'The Word' and every teaching being based on verses of scripture, Bible Studies, books on Bible themes, booklets based on daily Bible readings. This places emphasis on our studying and searching rather than realising that we now have a more sure word of prophecy, the Holy Spirit of truth, who is the mind of the Christ.

Bible study may indeed do good and no harm while we are filled with the Holy Spirit and aware that he is the source of communication with God, if we are hearing from Him directly. But when we are not filled with the Spirit and not hearing Him then we may shift from a real experience of listening to the Holy Spirit daily to searching the scriptures to see what ideas we can get to shape our lives.

Can you spot the difference? Spirit and Flesh?

I wasn't converted by understanding the mechanics of the message of salvation, or the 'Roman Road' as a certain system of explaining the message by using verses from Paul's letter to Romans is called. Rather by the grace of God, He poured out his Holy Spirit on me. This in accord with the promised new covenant as in **Jeremiah 31:33**.

I later came to some understanding of how this had been made possible through the acceptable sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for my sins and through his being raised from the dead by God on the third day. Of repentance and faith in the name of Jesus for remission of sins. Truly salvation is available to all, no matter how young or old, intelligent or otherwise. Indeed children can enter in for of such is the kingdom of Heaven. Faith that comes by hearing the word that comes from God and not understanding is the way we obtain salvation and anything else from God. "Experience first, doctrine second", as Watchman Nee often said.

I am still tempted to this day if I am not spiritually alive to 'try' to get something from searching the scriptures rather than by faith. Which I apparently do not have at the time,- 'not being filled with the Holy Spirit'.

"The letter kills but the Spirit gives life" may be a hackneyed phrase but it is one hundred percent true. Reliance on our understanding of scripture or our reading of scripture in order to hear from God is one of the reasons why large sections of evangelicals do not make any progress whatsoever.

Methodists remain Methodists; but they read the same Bible as;

Brethren who remain Brethren; who read the same Bible as;

Baptists which remain Baptists. These have the same Bible as;

Pentecostals who remain Pentecostals.

Each with their own distinctive version of the truth, taught weekly upon a basis of scripture. While we may want to and sometimes fight to stay the same, the Spirit blows where he wills and those born of the Spirit, and more importantly currently being filled with the Spirit, are as mobile as he is. We are quick to forget that God offers us an experience rather than an understanding, the Spirit of Truth rather than philosophy. Never have so many known so much, yet experienced so little.

When we are filled with the Spirit, perhaps even drunk with the Spirit, we have joy and a peace that are beyond understanding. No formula or creed comes anywhere near to the experience. Jesus died on the cross so that we could all have this experience.

What I had not grasped was that many other Pentecostals and I were in the same boat as charismatic Catholics and others from the old denominations.. Whilst we all may have had a real immersion in the Holy Spirit we were still living out our lives in the flesh. I also was following my own understanding of what was correct doctrine and practice. What made us Pentecostal wasn't the result of being led by the Spirit but following men and what 'our church' taught as being the word of God as from the scriptures. Different 'streams' of Pentecostal churches each continued propagating their individual creeds, practices and traditions.

Of course there is nothing new under the sun and we have clear examples of this big mistake in the Gospels. Here Jesus takes the scribes and Pharisees to task because they made a big deal out of scrupulously following the scriptures while 'making void the command of God by sticking to their traditions'. They had a let out clause to enable them to dodge giving their parents what was due to them, giving it instead into the offering. To them it may have seemed an advance on the command of God, an improvement. The fact is that any deviation from his command is rebellion. But they really believed that their traditions were equal to the command of God.

The Holy Spirit first revealed this to me with regard to the traditions I was following blinding me to his word and commands in this wise. My wife and our seven-month-old son and I were at the general conference of Assemblies of God at Butlin's Minehead Holiday Camp 1982. I was in the chalet we were sharing with another couple from our assembly, reading Matthew chapter twenty-three. The Holy Spirit just told me straight; "you by your traditions make void my commandments." He highlighted one area where this was the case, that is, that I called the other elder we were sharing with 'Pastor'. He could have pointed out very many areas, but he highlighted this one to get the point home, that I was led by tradition while claiming to be following his word. His word was an icon I carried around and looked at often but it wasn't allowed to be heard and acted upon. The blinding effect of adherence to tradition was the important lesson God revealed to me that day but I also stopped giving my brothers titles as this is directly contrary to his command. Maybe not important amongst religious organisations but very important amongst those born of water and the Spirit.

This was a part of God showing me that I wasn't a pupil of Jesus after all, but rather had become a pupil of the group of people I was involved with. Part of being a follower of the group of people I was with was having the bible as an icon; following what the elders taught and did and believing that I was de-facto a pupil of Jesus. One difference between the kingdom of God and tradition is that it cannot be taught or passed on from one person to another, again as promised in **Jeremiah 31:33** "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. "No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

We enter into the kingdom of God individually by faith responding to the message of repentance and remission of sins through the name of Jesus. We can, and should preach that the kingdom is at hand, and we should encourage folks to enter in. But we can only show the Christ to be the Way, the Truth, the Door, the Reality and the Life.

God's word is alive, a sharp two-edged sword that causes life to spring up where it is received. - First hand, direct from the Holy Spirit that is. Second hand, via human teachers, it can be death. It can cause deafness. It can make blind. As Jesus reminded us, it is written in the prophets; "Seeing they shall not see, hearing they shall not hear. They will listen and not understand." This is obviously not the fault of the Scriptures but our attitude, pride and lack of humility.

One would be excused for thinking that Jesus had told his pupils in John chapter sixteen when he was about to leave them; "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away the Bible will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send the New Testament to you with concordances and guides in about fifteen hundred years and there will be literacy among most of the population of the western world. And when it comes available in your own language and many different versions you will be able to work out what is my will and what I have to say to you. It will guide you in all truth and will glorify me, for it will declare what is mine to you."

What he actually said and what is actually the case is; **John 16:7** "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away the Instructor/Counsellor will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He is come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement: of sin, because they do not believe in me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father and you see me no more; of judgement, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on his own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify me, for He will take of what is mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are mine. Therefore I said that He will take of mine and declare it to you."

Those to whom the present role of the Holy Spirit is consigned to some vague and remote function read even this most important and potentially empowering scripture with glazed eyes. That He was active in the past is acknowledged. That He is the active partner in the 'Godhead' is promulgated. But the reality for many is that personal reading and public exposition of the scriptures have replaced Him. Rather it should be as in **Jeremiah 31:34**, "And they shall teach no more every man his fellow citizen and everyone his brother, saying, "know the Lord:" for they shall all see me, from the youngest (littlest) of them to the oldest (biggest) of them. For I will have mercy towards their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (LXX)

That this should be so is understandable. Personally I find it much easier and preferable to read material at my leisure, turn from one point to another, enjoying the time to make judgements and responses afforded by the written word, rather than to listen to someone 'live' and have to make immediate responses and judgements. This is why sales companies will usually want to make a sales pitch verbally rather than in writing.

A letter from a friend is a valuable backup to times of being together but is no substitute for conversation, listening and responding. The subjects of letters may be deeper than those of everyday chatting but it is the conversation that keeps a relationship alive. In the same way the Scriptures are a useful source of facts, information and insight into Gods heart, but it is daily conversation with the Holy Spirit that keeps our relationship with our Father a living reality. Indeed the Spirit often quotes scripture to us when he is talking to us. The problems come when we quote scripture at Him to justify what we are doing, as the Pharisees and Sadducees did to Jesus.

Was not the error of the Pharisees, zealous students and teachers of the law and prophets, that they did not recognise the Holy Spirit in the Christ Jesus? (Christ the Greek for Messiah, simply means the king anointed in order to save.)

John 5:31. "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. There is another who bears witness of me, and I know that his witness is true. You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light. But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which

the Father has given me to finish - the very works that I do - bear witness of me, that the Father has sent me. And the Father himself, who sent me, has testified of me. You have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his form. And you do not have his word abiding in you, because whom he sent, him you do not receive. You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life, and these are they which testify of me. But you are not willing to come to me that you may have life. I do not receive honour from men. But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. How can you believe, who receive honour from one another, and do not seek the honour that comes from the only (One) God? Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you - Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe his writing, how will you believe my words?"

The fourth gospel begins with; "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." **John 1:14** "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Throughout this gospel the writer makes the point that Jesus is the Word of God, and that He came to be heard. Later he makes the point that when Jesus returns to heaven He would send the Holy Spirit to take on his role of speaking the words of the Father to those who receive Him (the Spirit of God).

Because the Pharisees did not recognise the Spirit in Jesus they miss-interpreted his actions and words and rejected Him. Same as they had rejected the counsel of God through His prophet John the Baptist.

In contrast ordinary men, women and children recognised the Holy Spirit in Jesus. Accordingly Peter, an ignorant and unlearned fisherman confessed; "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." **John 7:14-16** "Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught. And the Jews marvelled, saying, How does this man know letters, having never learned? Jesus answered them, and said, My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man is willing to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.

The Law and Prophets testify of Jesus, the Messiah. The Bible speaks and teaches of the kingdom of God. Now the kingdom is here, just as Jesus was present amongst those teachers of the Law. They did not recognise his presence, and we may be in danger of not recognising the present reality of the kingdom of God. We have opportunity of participating in this here and now by the indwelling Holy Spirit. While we may find useful instruction and wisdom in the Scriptures, we could also retreat into them and out of the reality of the kingdom, away from the One sent from the Father, the Holy Spirit.

In John 3 Jesus teaches that without being born from above we cannot see the kingdom of God nor know anything pertaining to it.

John 3:1 'There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night (in the dark!), and said to him, Teacher, we see that you are a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that you do, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said to him, Verily, verily, I say to you, except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Jesus answered, "Verily, verily, I say to you, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said to you, you must be born again (from above). The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it comes, and whither it goes: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said to him, how can these things be? Jesus answered and said to him, Are you a teacher of Israel, and know not these things?

This passage is about darkness and light. About seeing and blindness. The knowledgeable teacher of the Law believed he had sight due to his familiarity with scripture. Jesus told him plainly that he was not able to see

(he was in the dark) unless he should be born of water and of the Spirit. It is not by might, nor by strength, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord. Only the Spirit gives light and revelation. Logic and reasoning will not result in our seeing the kingdom of God. Being born from above generates a son of the kingdom and opens the door to a revelation of the heavenly realms that we can actually dwell in.

Jesus contrasted hearing his word, receiving his word, to studying the words of the Law and Prophets. It is possible to take delight in the written word while being deaf to the living word of the Lord Jesus, he who is the Word of God, spoken by the Spirit. In **Acts 2: 41 - 47** we are told; “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles teaching, and (even) in community, and (even) in the breaking of bread and (even) in the prayers.” That is; the ministry of the Spirit through gifts (apostles) in the body, community within the body, the Lord’s Supper - discerning the Lord’s body, and unified prayers. By contrast we have a culture of insularity. We are taught to study the Bible alone, pray alone, and come along to public meetings to sing communal songs and listen to lectures. Then go home. Alone.

Luke’s account of Jesus at the house of Mary and Martha makes the point that we can be easily mentally distracted to the point of neglecting the opportunity to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear his word; - **Luke 10:38-42**.

The things that preoccupy us, preventing us from simply sitting at Jesus’ feet to hear him speak through the Spirit may be good, worthwhile things. Work, looking after the needs of others, study. The Scriptures are complimentary and supplementary to hearing directly from the Holy Spirit by faith. They are not meant to be an alternative for those with less faith. Correctly grasping the fact that Jesus had come to serve us— in teaching - Mary sat at His feet and listened to Him. Wrongly thinking that Jesus had come to be served, Martha got flustered!

Bible study is good but it is not necessarily sitting at Jesus’ feet hearing His teaching. My point in writing this chapter is just this. Let’s not imagine that first came the Law and the Prophets, then Jesus, then the New Testament; therefore as Jesus has returned to heaven what is left is the Scriptures. This would be to ignore the coming of the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him and who is manifest in the body of Christ locally. When we seize the fact that He is given to us to teach us, we’ll sit at His feet and listen. If we think that the Spirit is only come to be worshipped, we may just get flustered!

We have to face that fact that the Bible has become a tool in the hand of leaders to back up whatever traditions they may hold. Indeed it may have become such a tool in our own hands. By earnestly seeking to be obedient to his word as spoken to us by the Spirit, as well as through other members of the local assembly, whatever the consequences among our elders and people, we will find that He still speaks the words of Life.

Indeed, as Jesus said, His word (communication) is spirit and life to those who receive it.

CHAPTER 6: "AND WHERE ARE YOU GOING NOW?"

These words will have special poignancy to anyone who has left their usual place of meeting. It is the one question that is inevitable when meeting old acquaintances. Sometimes one forgets the context such people are thinking in and may reply with something like. "Oh, I'm just off to the bank." Of course what is meant by the question is which clearly defined group of people you are associated with or which public place of worship you are attending.

While it is mostly forgivable to be temporarily in limbo, or to be filling in with passive attendance at some neutral place, it is definitely not acceptable to reply with "nowhere" and appear pleased about it. It is even more perplexing to the honest inquirer if you appear to be 'still going on with God.' Is it possible? Often I am sure the inquirer earnestly dreams and wishes that it may be so. Wow!

Usually such a reply results in a quick change of subject. "Nice weather we are having," etc. and a "Must be going, really good to see you." Alternatively it may result in a quick verbal 'seeing to.' This can centre on the need for a 'spiritual home' or to have a 'base' where you 'fit in' and are 'accountable'. Scriptures like "do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together" may be thrown up. Also somewhat ironically phrases like "need for fellowship" may be used.

During such encounters I would often invite the outraged or concerned inquirer to come round to our house and discuss the matter properly at some convenient time. That none ever did led me subsequently to not take these encounters too seriously. So, let's imagine that you have gone to the bother to discuss this seriously. Only you aren't going to get a word in!

Jesus said that when two or three are gathered in his name, he is in the midst of the two or three. Praise God that this actually is the case and wonderful to experience. It has often been my experience that when twenty or more gather together in Jesus' name some guy may take over. Sometimes the result can be entertaining, uplifting, reassuring or relaxing (very relaxing). Sometimes not.

However I do find that when I gather with another one or two in Jesus name then Jesus is in the midst through His Holy Spirit and as one would expect He really does do us good. And He gets the glory and the praise. Our faith is increased because it is the Holy Spirit who is working through ordinary people. What the Holy Spirit brings up is relevant to those gathered. When we are together we find that each has something from the Spirit to share with each other. It's no effort! We don't have to claim the promise but we can simply experience the fulfilling of the promise which we find in Paul's letter to the assembly at Corinth. Here he observes. **1 Corinthians 14: 26**, "How is it then? When you are gathered together each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation." (Not necessarily in that order.)

I can painfully remember trying to square the circle of meeting together, having an agenda led by some specific person, with this line from Paul's letter. They are pretty well incompatible. The leading of the Spirit is not the same as the leading of a man.

Even in smaller house group meetings the strain of trying to get folks to relax and be themselves, instead of either performing or sitting back in the fixed belief that they couldn't have anything to offer, can be extremely frustrating.

We only get what we have faith for. Hence where we don't have faith that the Holy Spirit is in us and do not expect that he really uses all of the saints including us in his ministry to the body then we come together without each having some contribution. This is not to be confused with preparation. The proper preparation for gathering together is to be filled with the Spirit. To spend time humbly at the feet of Jesus listening for His word. To have faith for His operating in oneself. To expect Him to give one a hymn or a teaching or a revelation or a tongue or a prophecy, if He chooses to. If on the other hand we prepare by searching frantically

for some 'suitable' item to bring then we are operating in the flesh and not in faith. I know because I also have done this myself many times.

The difference in the result is as the difference between life and death. The conditioning that results from years of 'pew filling' attendance at platform centred meetings means that the reality of a coming together as equals expecting the Holy Spirit to be operating in gifts is a million miles away from our imaginations and expectations. It has taken years of being away from such 'laity – clergy; performer - audience' affairs to get the negative effects cleansed from my system. These negative effects hamper 'laity' and 'clergy' equally.

Doubtless some may say that it is just prudent to prepare in advance a contribution to make when we are gathered together. In **Mark 13:11**, Jesus says; "But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that: For it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit." Much more than it shall be given to us at the point of sharing what we have to give that is of the Spirit. Having said that we can only share that which we have inside us. Sometimes the Holy Spirit will reveal a word or exhortation in advance of it being shared so that it can be shared in an effective and considered manner at an appropriate opportunity. Much of what the apostle Paul had to share was out of the store of good things he possessed. As Jesus told his pupils in **Matthew 13:52**, "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old."

Preparation should be ensuring we have a good sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, rather than a feverish scratching around for material to fill in an allotted time slot. Faith trusts the totally dependable Holy Spirit and is not let down. I first came to this position of trusting the Spirit for instantaneous inspiration during a time when I was meeting informally with some guys who together with me wanted to be pupils of Jesus. At first I would receive some revelation from the Spirit and would write it down and make points etc. Then when we were together I would share it, using the notes I had prepared. This was fine but soon I realised that this could quickly degenerate into the usual type of human led lecture. So I started to trust the Holy Spirit more for instantaneous direction and inspiration. And he always came up with the goods. This is because he sees better than we do. He would sometimes however let me know in advance what he wanted me to bring up and I would check up confirmation and illumination from the scriptures.

So, where am I going now? I am going to see friends. Friends come to see me. In the name of Jesus. It would be easier just to go to some impersonal 'event' type meeting where you just have to sit but no, thanks. Following the Christ is not about being a member of an audience nor a performer, but of sticking to Him and being members one of another.

A good example of the twos and threes type of assembling is the occasion of the two pupils of Jesus on the road to Emmaus on the day Jesus was raised from the dead. Here the two were discussing the events of the preceding days when Jesus drew near and joined them. They were together because they were pupils of Jesus. Jesus asked them what they were discussing. They told him what was bothering them. He then went through the scriptures explaining why it was necessary that the Messiah would suffer and be raised from the dead. Their hearts burned within them while he opened the scriptures to them. He was revealed to them when they broke bread together. No big deal, just the usual evening meal. They knew that the risen Jesus had been with them. What they had been perplexed about had been explained and they were thrilled with the experience of an encounter with Jesus.

And this is how it can be whenever two or three are gathered in Jesus' name. Do we desire this? Or does it just seem too much hard work to be foregone in favour of larger gatherings with well prepared music and special speakers?

I would point out that I don't propose that only gatherings of two or three are useful. I would say however that it is better to start with the twos or threes. The fewer folk present then the less pretence, aggravation and waffle has been my experience. I would always make room in the week for getting together with folks by twos and

threes. It seems to be a good idea to practice listening to others and the Spirit under these conditions in preparation for larger gatherings.

It is usual for people to want to be associated with an event that consists of large numbers, the subliminal thinking being the bigger the better. One of the questions asked when folks, especially leaders, from different organisations are together is; "How many?" Our confidence can be that by being knit together with some particular individuals who are part of the body of Christ then we are a real part of the one and only Assembly of Jesus the Christ and the local expression of his Body in particular; the number of disciples/pupils of Jesus in the place we live.

Clearly the passage in Paul's letter to the Corinthians indicates that the assemblies would consist of larger numbers of people. It would be a long meeting though if all spoke in turn as Paul says they would have opportunity, should there be much more than thirty at a gathering! The Apostles in Jerusalem where the assembly numbered in tens of thousands could have held mass meetings in order to reach the maximum numbers with their teaching. But rather they purposely went house to house. Paul did the same in Ephesus. The natural limit to a useful number of folk gathering is the maximum that can participate one by one without it dragging on or folk being rushed. Once this number is exceeded then the time may become organised with the 'specialists' and gurus taking over. With the danger of Pews and Platform. Clergy and Laity. Musicians and Congregation. Them and us. The reality is that there is the Holy Spirit in us and He is all we need. If we depend on Him He will teach us how to be together.

There is a problem to be overcome if we want this two or three fellowship. One or two in fact. That is, someone to be the other one or two. It stands out in the New Testament that God puts people together in twos or threes. Look at the list of the apostles. Look at Paul's greetings at the ends of his letters. The last act of Jesus on the cross was to present his mother to the disciple He loved for him to take her on as his own 'mother' and for her to take on this beloved pupil as her 'son'. Barnabus took on Saul. When they parted company Saul hooked up with Silas.

Paul's desire for the saints was that the individual members be 'knit together in love'. In the body, which he was using as an illustration, each member or part of the body is 'knit' to its neighbouring part. It isn't knit directly to the whole but indirectly, through the network of individual parts. I can't have a direct relationship with the whole local assembly but I can have a good, real, effective relationship with those few that God has placed directly beside me. Without the joints of community the Spirit cannot flow in ministry through each part to the whole. Or in the other direction!

So, who would you gather with in a two or three scenario? It is more important that there are such people than that you have such times together! God seems always to give someone as a 'partner' to those newly born again very soon after or during the initial experience. Can you remember the partner God gave you when you were first born of the Spirit? I must sadly confess that I didn't appreciate mine. I thought that I had to sacrifice relationships for the sake of the kingdom of God. While that is true, it should be a case of those not committed to the kingdom leaving us, not of us leaving all and sundry.

One of the saddest things I come across is the amount of folk with no 'Barnabus'. Most people I have asked have said that they did have such a relationship in the past but that person has moved on or they themselves have moved on.

We can then be quick to search for a group to join but it seems easy to give up on having another partner. Even easier to protect oneself from getting 'too close' to individuals in the assembly generally. A great obstacle to finding a partner, someone to spend 'quality' time with, can be a simple lack of time. On various occasions I have discussed the need of one to one fellowship, just being together, with brothers I have been involved with within a larger formal group and there has been complete agreement with such a need. Indeed no one has disagreed with the principle. One brother, a vicar who lived across the street from me, said he would love to be

in such a relationship with me but he simply did not have the time. He was not making excuses either. My fellow elders said the same. And in each case it was true. With two meetings each Sunday, prayer meeting on Tuesday evening, Thursday night bible study, Friday night prison visiting, elder's prayer meeting Saturday morning, elder's meetings each month. Occasional special meetings. Plus jobs and families. (Pity the poor long suffering families!) The vicar had even less spare time! I would humbly suggest that obeying Christ's commandment that we love one another should take priority over running what we may see as the group's business.

Another obstacle is shyness. We may have to ask another believer (of the same sex) if they would consider putting aside some time to just be together, talk, listen and pray. The fear of rejection, or appearing cranky or foolish may be very real and strong. But if we ask our Father about the matter and know it is his will we can use this as an opportunity to be bold in the Lord. Having said that, I myself have put off asking someone for months until the Lord really pressed the point home to me.

Having a simple meal together gives a relaxed opportunity to converse without pressure and so find out more about one another. Breakfast or lunch works well when it is mutually convenient. Prayer together afterwards tends to be natural and very often follows on from the conversation. Following on from such times it would be very natural to be occasionally spending time together socially, perhaps with each other's families or friends. This necessitates an appropriate amount of free time. Hence perhaps a serious adjustment of priorities will be needed. But then, the kingdom of God does make calls on our priorities and our schedules. So the need to differentiate between building up an organised group and really participating in the kingdom at a personal, one to one level.

Once you have one such relationship it makes sense to have others in such a relationship and to encourage your friends to do likewise. In this way the whole assembly in our locality can be knitted together. If we only have one relationship then we could become insular, xenophobic, crazy. I have been persuaded by the Lord to make friends of different sorts of people. If I just selected those of a particular type, best suited to my personal taste, then it would be like trying to paint a picture using only the colours I liked. The result would have no similarity to real life. The body of Christ is just that - of Christ, not mine to pick and choose.

I am very grateful to my Father for allowing me to have friends with whom I can pray and gather with in spite of the way I have not always appreciated this wonderful gift in the past. A major part of the good news of the kingdom of God is that he sets the solitary in families. The family takes priority over the village. The village takes priority over the nation in our hearts.

Our Father desires greatly to set us all in families. He wants you and I to have brothers and sisters with whom we can have honest intimate relationships. Only in such relationships can we confess our sins one to another and show the love of the Spirit to one another, with forgiveness and encouragement. To me the alternative is a hollow sham. We can only be faithful to the local assembly in as much as we are faithful to our brother.

So let me ask you the question. And where are you going now?

CHAPTER 7: DEMONSTRATION PLEASE!

The Message. Paul's declaration of the good news of God's new covenant was an explanation of a demonstration, not a mere presentation. Paul was interested in seeing power not words. To James, faith without works was dead.

And so it is with most people. 'A picture is worth a thousand words', as any salesman will tell you. Paul witnessed to the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit, not just in clever words. Indeed he confessed to not being an attractive speaker. The good news is that the message is about explaining the demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit, not merely going into theology or convincing argument.

Our short fall is often in the demonstration area. When a product is demonstrated to a prospective buyer the attractive qualities of the product stimulate desire and suggest need.

We used to have a sewing machine shop and most sales came as a result of demonstrating the machines to people who came into the shop. Some of these came specifically because they wanted a new sewing machine but many were there for other reasons. First they saw the machines on display and my wife or I would give a demonstration whether they asked for a demo or not. Having seen and heard the machine the customer would then want to ask questions about its qualities and we would explain the various features and advantages.

Often the demonstration was less than perfect and the sales pitch may have been inferior but it was the product itself that grabbed the customer's attention, making itself desirable to those watching.

On the day of Pentecost Peter said to the inquiring crowd 'This is that' and explained what it was they were seeing and hearing. After that those who believed and obeyed the good news by repenting, being baptised in the name of Jesus for remission of sins ; received the gift of the Holy Spirit and continued together in the apostles teaching; in fellowship - community, in breaking bread house to house and in praying together. The Lord worked with them with signs and wonders and other people were added daily to the assembly. They then became a demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit and faith in the name of Jesus; and by the love they had one for another. And so the number of the pupils multiplied!

The local assembly of the saints is meant to be God's ultimate ongoing demonstration of his power and love in the locality. The pillar and the ground of truth. I don't read anywhere of further signs of tongues of fire though I have heard of this in Ethiopia in 1972 from someone who was there. Sadly there aren't many well substantiated and documented signs and wonders happening where I live. There are some mighty healings in the name of Jesus through faith in that name. But the lasting, constant demonstration of the reality of the good news of faith in the Christ should be in the visible practical love of the brothers and sisters one to another. This is only possible by the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

"The Jews demand a sign and the Greeks wisdom." Some of us demand both. In so doing we may miss the real substance of the kingdom of God, his love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit with consequent joy, peace and righteousness. This worked out in genuine involvement with each other, not just meetings.

We can only demonstrate that which we actually possess. If you have one of the miraculous power gifts such as gifts of healings or miracles, by all means operate in them. I have to say that I have not seen many of such demonstrations. Like most believers I would dearly love to see more of the clear demonstrations of signs and wonders accompanying the preaching of the message of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus. Indeed we should be praying together for more signs and wonders to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, the Christ, so that folks may see and believe in the power of the name of Jesus. As these signs are God's way of attesting to the message of repentance and remission of sins in the name of Jesus Christ perhaps we should take a good look at the message we currently hear! Generally in evangelical circles the name of Jesus has been replaced with the

name 'of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Ghost'. This is so we can see who are truly the messengers sent by God with the good message that is by revelation of Jesus Christ.

In the past I had only perceived signs and wonders to be the demonstration of the kingdom, but now I see the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit as a powerful ongoing testimony to the reality of God's love. The fact is that many believers will never operate in signs and wonders. But we all can show the love of God in our lives together, if indeed the Spirit of Christ dwells in us.

There is a great and prevalent danger among the saints of being caught up with the drama and excitement associated with signs and wonders. By all means let us seek them, but let's not be obsessed with them or blinded to the need to demonstrate that which should be in our power to manifest. The kingdom of God is the community of God in relationship with his sons. When we are talking about the kingdom of God we are talking about an actual community. "They who were not a people shall be called my people." As Peter wrote; "We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, an Holy Nation belonging to God." This should be patently apparent in the love and unity of all the saints in each place, one for another.

We are called to be a visible community, one people, so that God's love working in us by the power of the Holy Spirit may have an opportunity to be manifested, through our serving, understanding and accommodating each other. A person on a deserted island has no opportunity to love. Love is a verb that requires an object. The Holy Spirit does not share God's love abroad in our hearts so that we can be thrilled at the theology of it! The whole universal body of saints is called many times in Scripture 'the assembly', as is also the local number of disciples of Jesus. The point about members of an assembly is that they get to assemble and be assembled and spend time assembling. This is the work of the Spirit in us.

Jesus in the fourth Gospel clearly teaches his followers that a new standard of social behaviour is required of those in God's kingdom and that the hallmark is love that surpasses human, natural love. "By this shall all men know that you are my pupils, that you have love one for another." This is the demonstration referred to. I really enjoy singing about the love of God, and my love for him, but Jesus is looking for us to "so do for the least of these my brethren". But again, this is only possible through continuing in the Spirit.

Jesus said of His pupils in **Matthew 5:13-16**; "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its taste, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp stand, and it gives light to all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

Here Jesus likened the saints to a city built on a hill, a community visible from a great distance. The picture is one of night-time with the lights of the city shining in the darkness like a beacon on the hill in the distance. To the weary traveller there is no more welcome sight.

It can seem as if we believed we had managed to cram the 'light of the world' into a box, which was kept closed most of the week, but to which we could invite folk to come and take a peek at once a week for a couple of hours. Very like that lamp lit and then hid under a basket. Only it was a very feeble light we had under our basket.

In general the elements of what should be the community life of believers have been reformed into elements within the schedules and establishments of meeting and program centred institutions.

Breaking bread house to house can become reduced to a ritual observed during the course of a meeting at a special place instead of a genuine simple meal shared by a few believers who are together for fellowship in Jesus' name. It is meant to be within the context of practical community in the locality.

‘Greet one another with a holy kiss’ becomes a holy hug or handshake at the door prior to a meeting rather than indicative of people who see each other often.

‘Seeing to the needs of the poor’ becomes replaced in emphasis by an impersonal ‘tithes and offerings’ collected at a meeting and geared mainly to the financial support of the institution. This rather than folk in fellowship with one another meeting needs as they arise and as they have opportunity to share.

‘Elders shepherd the flock’ has become ‘pastor preach every Sunday and maintain the institution’ instead of the older saints overseeing care for the community and individuals one to one.

‘Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together’ becomes ‘make sure you get to the Sunday morning formal meeting’ instead of ensuring that we come together in open informal relationships. What the writer to the Hebrews had in mind is clarified by what follows: **Hebrews 10: 25** ‘And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works’.

This reduction of elements of community life in the Spirit to institutional norms and liturgy began a very long time ago, before 300A.D. But we don’t have to be like that, do we? I certainly wouldn’t want to count on this fact as an excuse before the judgement seat of Christ when we have to give an account.

I wouldn’t want to make what we have look more like the real thing. We can have the real thing if we want it and are prepared to let go of all that is not the genuine article. We can choose to build with silver and gold or with straw. Obviously there is a lot more straw around than precious metals. We don’t have the option to build with straw and then paint over it with gold paint. Or has that been done?

What would make the difference would be if we had power after that the Holy Spirit came upon us! If we sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, at the cost of conventional ‘Churchianity’. Then we would be witnesses - demonstrators, beginning where we live, spreading to our nation and then throughout the world.

So what’s changed? Men are still organising without the involvement of the Holy Spirit. Appointing this one. Ordaining that one. Maybe it’s the Protestant work ethic that makes us feel guilty if we aren’t doing something. Notice boards full of formal meetings and events.

On the other hand God appoints men or women filled with the Holy Spirit to good works ordained from the foundation of the world. Islam, Fascism, persecution and imprisonment do not stop these. While faith endowed with the Holy Spirit produces works that glorify God, works without faith are merely works.

The great news is that the promise of the Father is to all those who believe. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the birthright of all who believe on the name of the Lord Jesus, the anointed King and Saviour. A visible community of believers knit together in love is the Holy Spirit’s objective in us.

CHAPTER 8: "THE BACK DOOR"

One often hears about the front door and the back door of the religious organisations in connection with the gain and loss of members. The front door is obviously the means by which members are attracted and added. New members may be new converts or more likely folks transferring from one group to another. Understandably a lot of time and effort goes into work on the front door. Everyone wants his or her group to grow and to be involved with success. The back door, the gradual loss of members, is understandably not a popular topic. No one likes failure. In some situations the organisation is like a leaking pot, frantically being filled at one end and leaking at the other. The pot will fill but only as long as fresh supplies are being poured in.

Some however do take great care over closing the back door, since if this loss can be stemmed, then increase will be dramatically faster. To a young convert this problem may not be too apparent or appear not too serious a matter. After thirty years of seeing people come in and then go, some after three months, some after three years, some after thirteen years, the true magnitude of this tragic loss can be seen for what it is. A common attitude is; "We can't force people to stay. If they want to go, let them go." Those who leave may be branded backsliders or their original conversion may be doubted. Some of the more aggressive positively encourage those who are not committed to the current vision of the leadership to leave. They boast, "My church is hard to enter, easy to leave." The essence being that it truly is 'their' church and not the body of Jesus Christ. With such strong cult-like attitudes they tend to have larger congregations and so may appear 'successful' in the same way the Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses may be said to be successful. But many believers are stumbled and cast off on the way.

The theme of this chapter is basically my motivation for writing this book. The various groups as they currently function are not generally close knit communities with true relationships based only on the other person's being a son of the kingdom. As a result many sever connections and die, some as babies, some as youths spiritually, some at a stage when they should be mature. I say this because I could name so many people who have died spiritually at all these different stages. As Paul highlights in his letter to the Thessalonians, faith can be augmented, therefore it can be diminished. A benefit of true community with the saints is mutual strengthening of faith in the Christ.

The problem is not so much what happens in the organised meetings so much as what is missing from the lives of the believers; Fellowship. Koinonia in the Greek - it means community, partnership, companionship, sharing, with communication being central to its meaning.

Jewish culture seems to be full of sharing and communicating. Where I live in Gateshead there is a very large Hassidic community. Every Friday evening you can see small groups of Jewish folk hurrying to get to the houses in which they will be sharing the meal they have at the start of Shabbat - the Sabbath. They always seem to be talking to one another. Boys with boys, girls with girls, men with men, women with women. Their community life style, with communication and sharing at an intimate level rather than a 'stadium' or public event level, is a major factor in their survival and strength.

Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age."

This was Christ giving instructions to His apostles just before the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given. On that day when the Holy Spirit came upon Peter he stood up and preached the message of repentance and remission of sins through the name of Jesus Christ resulting in 3000 becoming disciples of Jesus and being added to (built into) the assembly of Christ;

Acts 2:36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let

every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine (the things taught by the apostles) (and=even) fellowship, even the breaking of bread, even prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together (Greek sense is ‘about the same thing’ = in harmony) and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church (ekklesia – assembly) daily those who were being saved.

All of the following is only possible by the indwelling Christ Who is the Spirit.

The Lord Jesus Christ had spent over 3 years teaching His disciples – students – apprentices – about the kingdom of God. It wasn’t bible school or theology. I wasn’t how to win friends and influence people. It wasn’t about communication techniques. What was the major thing Jesus taught those who left everything to follow Him?

John 15:9 “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.

John 17:20 “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

Jesus had majored on teaching His followers to love one another, to continue with one another, to forgive one another, to share with one another, to support one another, to not criticize or judge one another, to give to one another. These were among Christ’s commandments to be taught by His apostles for the next generation of disciples to observe. Commandments are to be observed, obeyed, carried out. The commandments of Christ can only be fully observed by those who have repented – dropped everything to follow Jesus – and received the gift of the Holy Spirit, Who sheds His love abroad in their hearts. They are not a new set of rules to burden folks unwilling or unable to carry them out.

First hearing and believing the message of repentance and remission of sins through the name of Jesus Christ.

Then repentance – leaving all, everyone, everything, every way and every thought to follow Jesus.

Then baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission (removal, release from) sins.

Then receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit resulting in prophesy/speaking in new languages.

Then being instructed in the commandments of Christ (the apostles’ doctrine – the things taught by the apostles for the new disciples to observe.)

As seen in Acts 2:42 first to be taught was community – koinonia – meaning commonality – having things shared.

Such a picture of intense fellowship and community can strike fear into the heart of modern day western believers. It looks more like a weird cult to us than like the ‘place of worship’ on the corner of the street. The apostles were daily in the temple - a public place- preaching and teaching Jesus to be the Messiah. We may be comfortable with this so far. They were there praying daily also as it was a public place of prayer. Note it wasn’t their private place of preaching or praying. It wasn’t their building. It was the place that the Jews came to pray. It was a neutral public venue.

It is important to note that those who responded to the preaching of the message of the Christ did not join an organisation; they were joined together with other people who were also pupils of Jesus.

This was no idyllic heaven on earth with the saints living in perfect harmony. They were still human beings subject to the same distractions and temptations as us. They had disagreements and friction now and again. We make it difficult for ourselves to be in similar community with one another if we expect our brothers and sisters to be perfect, wonderful people. Why should they be when I am not? It is in the midst of relationships with fellow sinners saved by grace that the supernatural love of the Spirit shed abroad in our hearts shines in forgiveness, compassion, confession and understanding. The love of God is real, not imaginary and works among real, rather than idealised people.

So they continued daily en-mass in the temple and broke bread - or ate meals, remembering the body and blood sacrifice of Jesus on the cross - together in each other’s houses – from house to house. Their houses were their home territory. This we may not be so comfortable with. It may not sit well with our culture. The only regular meeting described in the scriptures is the assembling to celebrate the Lords Supper. We do have an outline for our times of assembling together in Jesus’ name. It is in the whole of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. It is helpful to read it noting the many references to assembling together, to the bread and the cup, and to our Passover.

The second commandment to be observed then was breaking bread, daily house to house. Daily implies no set day or time and house to house implies no set place but wherever and whenever was convenient. This was worship in spirit and in truth, not in this or that particular place or time.

Luke 22:14 When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, “With *ferve*nt desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, “Take this and divide *it* among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” And He took bread, gave thanks and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.”

After this last supper Jesus did something that illustrated the purpose of breaking bread to not forget Him.

John 13:1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, “Lord, are You washing my feet?” Jesus answered and said to him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.” Peter said to Him, “You shall never wash my feet!” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.” Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!” Jesus said to him, “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.” For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, “You are not all clean.” So when He had

washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

The disciples like the Jews of the time would have been aware of the ordinance of the ashes of the red heifer which was given so the priests and Levites could restore sanctification after becoming un-clean and unable to function in the house of God.

Numbers 19:1 Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, “This *is* the ordinance of the law which the LORD has commanded, saying: ‘Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring you a red heifer without blemish, in which there *is* no defect *and* on which a yoke has never come. You shall give it to Eleazar the priest, that he may take it outside the camp, and it shall be slaughtered before him; and Eleazar the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger, and sprinkle some of its blood seven times directly in front of the tabernacle of meeting. Then the heifer shall be burned in his sight: its hide, its flesh, its blood, and its offal shall be burned. And the priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet, and cast *them* into the midst of the fire burning the heifer. Then the priest shall wash his clothes, he shall bathe in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp; the priest shall be unclean until evening. And the one who burns it shall wash his clothes in water, bathe in water, and shall be unclean until evening. Then a man *who is* clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and store *them* outside the camp in a clean place; and they shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for the water of purification; it *is* for purifying from sin. And the one who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until evening. It shall be a statute forever to the children of Israel and to the stranger who dwells among them. He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days. He shall purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; *then* he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean. Whoever touches the body of anyone who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the LORD. That person shall be cut off from Israel. He shall be unclean, because the water of purification was not sprinkled on him; his uncleanness *is* still on him.

This *is* the law when a man dies in a tent: All who come into the tent and all who *are* in the tent shall be unclean seven days; and every open vessel, which has no cover fastened on it, *is* unclean. Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain by a sword or who has died, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days. And for an unclean *person* they shall take some of the ashes of the heifer burnt for purification from sin, and running water shall be put on them in a vessel. A clean person shall take hyssop and dip *it* in the water, sprinkle *it* on the tent, on all the vessels, on the persons who were there, or on the one who touched a bone, the slain, the dead, or a grave. The clean *person* shall sprinkle the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, wash his clothes, and bathe in water; and at evening he shall be clean. But the man who is unclean and does not purify himself, that person shall be cut off from among the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the LORD. The water of purification has not been sprinkled on him; he *is* unclean.

Having been chosen by God to be priests and serve in the Holy place the priests were first washed (a shadow of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission – removal of sins). Then they were consecrated by having oil poured over them (a shadow of the gift of the Holy Spirit). Then they were dressed in Holy robes (a shadow of justification and sanctification by the Holy Spirit). In this way they were purified and could perform their service in the tabernacle without being slain by the most Holy God.

But when they left the tabernacle there was always a chance they might become unclean through contact with an unclean situation or object. That would mean that they were then unclean and unable to carry out their service in the Holy place. For this reason the ordinance of the ashes of the red heifer was given, to restore a clean status before God.

The ashes of the red heifer were a memorial before God of the sacrifice for purification that had been made outside the camp of an offering without blemish. A shadow of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ the Lamb of God outside the gates of Jerusalem which took away the sins of the world.

In breaking the bread in memorial to the body of Christ broken for us and drinking the cup in memorial of the blood shed for the remission – removal – of our sins we have the opportunity to examine ourselves,

confess our sins and know that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all iniquity. Thereby restoring a clean conscience to those called to serve the Living God.

1 Corinthians 11:17 Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church (an assembly), I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church (assembly) of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

The above is a good account of disciples of Jesus Christ assembling together in order to share a meal together and to break bread in remembrance of the Lord's death as commanded by Jesus Himself. It was to be done in the context of a shared meal – doing it for one another.

Not a religious observance or ritual but a simple act of discerning Christ's body and blood by which we can have propitiation for our sins.

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

The Lord's Supper is a wonderful basis for assembling. By commencing with giving thanks for the body of Christ, and breaking the loaf, the theme is set for the evening. Then sharing in the meal which all have contributed to engages everyone in communication, listening, enjoying one another's company. Not rushing it. Without community, the 'spiritual' bit would not flow naturally together, but have to be organised or planned in advance. Breaking bread house to house was not the invention of the apostles; it was and still is Christ's commandment, for our good.

If we are obedient in these things, it will be life and health to us, building community, self-esteem and a testimony to the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Later in Acts chapter five we are informed that the apostles were daily in the temple and in every house they did not cease from teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. So they had the large public open gatherings and the individual house to house gatherings daily. Does it not seem strange to us that the apostles should not concentrate on the large crowds through public preaching? It is not without significance that they went house to house, as did also Paul as he mentions in his letters. Please note that house to house does not mean a la Jehovah's Witnesses, cold calling at stranger's doors to ask if they could share the news of Christ. House to house here means in the believers homes, where they shared meals and teaching together. Really they were just carrying on as Jesus had taught them. He had taught them to be together, to eat together, and to have one purse (with Judas as the treasurer). He had prayed that they may be one as he and the Father were one. Paul later

echoed this when he wrote to some believers in Rome, “Receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.”

Jesus had been in intimate fellowship with the twelve, especially with Peter, John, James and with the other disciple he loved. He set the pattern for relationships with specific individuals. The apostles carried this on as fundamental to the saints’ lives. This was teaching by example, springing out of the life of Christ within. It didn’t need verbalising or elaborating. It was how they lived. It is the same with the Hassidic community. It is how they are.

All the verbal teaching in the world on fellowship won’t make it so. Fellowship is something we do. Or don’t do. The lack of this intimate fellowship is the route to the exit of the assembly. It may even be said that we have fostered what is in effect a warm indifference between members. I recently heard a tape from a conference of pastors in Sweden by a much-respected leader of one of the largest congregations in that country. Here he ridiculed the attitude of members who say, “I am here for fellowship.” His response was; “Well I am here to work. We only want workers here.” As he made clear in the rest of his lecture, those who were in the congregation for fellowship could clear off, he just wanted workers. All this was greeted with great enthusiasm from his audience of leaders and the bulk of the folks I was listening to the tape with. I believe this revolting attitude is prevalent because the word fellowship has been relegated to mean gathering in groups to hear somebody preach, sing songs and pray together; that is - meetings. True fellowship, that is community, being knit together in love, should be our response to Jesus’ new commandment, that we love one another. It should be the outworking of the Holy Spirit in us, that we love the brother we can see. Fellowship – community, is nothing to do with formal meetings whatsoever. Rather it is the fruit of fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

Our love for our brothers and sisters is in effect just a reflection of our love for our Lord Jesus. It can be no more and no less. It is the love of Christ within our hearts, breaking out.

Getting people involved with the work of bringing folks in, keeping tabs on them and encouraging them to keep on coming is a great way to keep members. What you don’t use you lose. It works in evangelical circles. It works for Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses also. It works anywhere because it is good human psychology. It is not fellowship in the Spirit. On the other hand fellowship in the Spirit will inevitably mean that those in fellowship are committed to one another and will work for the success and encouragement of one another. And the Lord will add to those in fellowship with one another. Can you see the difference? One is simply a practical method of control, motivated by a natural desire for success; the other is by faith operating through love. The first is getting people to join the organisation, whereas fellowship is getting people to join one another. I feel I should repeat this. Fellowship is people who are joined to Christ the head, joining with one another.

Ultimately the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit is the cement that keeps us together. Without this folks gradually drift apart, with the occasional spectacular falling apart and division. This is the greatest difference between the western saints of today and the early saints. The lack of true fellowship one with another is the fundamental flaw that urgently cries out for redress. I do not see the saints as a whole getting back to spirit filled fellowship, but the way is open for every individual who wants to obey Jesus and get involved in down to earth fellowship with other believers. As it is written in Acts, after the apostles had been threatened by the religious leaders of the people, being let go, they went to their own company.

You may remember when you were first converted and everyone was giving you lots of attention. You felt loved and that all these lovely people cared about you. This may have lasted about three months or so or until someone else was converted and became the centre of attraction. We are meant to be getting and giving one another some of this attention continually. We don’t need everyone to be making a fuss over us but we do need someone to be concerned about us. Equally we shouldn’t try to care for everyone but ensure we do care for someone consistently. It is changing one’s focus from the group to individuals.

So, if we want to close the back door we can endeavour to make every member a worker, an effective technique that will bring some results. Or we can get back to original community, the outworking of the Spirit in us in obedience to Christ's commandment that we love another. The dilemma being that while we can humanly bring about the former we need the Holy Spirit to have the latter. And the latter depends on each individual being indwelt by the Spirit and listening to Him. I truly thank God that in these days he is pouring out his Spirit on all flesh, in all sorts of groups of folks. Surely now is the time to leave behind the human strategies and techniques and give the saints back to the Holy Spirit. Then we will not have doors, front or back, but the local assembly can again be as yeast, which grows until it leavens the whole lump of dough.

CHAPTER 9: “SEE THAT YOU BUILD ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN”

“I feel I have a call to the ministry.”

Have you heard this expression? Have you used it yourself perhaps?

Many times I have had some person come to me, either at a gathering or one to one. During a brief summary of their past and aspirations they have uttered these words. How sad! Sad because all those called to follow Jesus are called to be his servants (ministers). Sad because all whom he calls he empowers and equips through the Holy Spirit. Sad because it reveals the deadly neutering effect of an environment where some are ‘ministers’ and most are not.

Which brings us to the theme of this chapter.

I am not going to go on about the tabernacle in the wilderness and the subsequent building of the temple in Jerusalem. Although I would mention that God did give precise detailed instructions for these, right down to the colour of the curtains and how many curtain hooks there should be! We can learn from this Old Testament type that God does insist that his household be built or ordered after his specific pattern. Rather I want to look at how the local assemblies in the New Testament writings had a pattern, as Paul established them wherever he went with the good news. He does not seem to have left precise written instructions as these were not necessary, having built according to the pattern he had received and leaving His pupils with this pattern in effect. There are however many clues in the New Testament writings and Paul did commend those who carried on according to this pattern, i.e. the instructions he had passed on. It is tragic that while we may make much of the letters of Paul and of his teaching in them we can appear to be oblivious to the pattern he was careful to order the assemblies by. To Paul, as indeed to Jews even today, doctrine and practice were both equally important. Truly, teaching should follow experience.

What then was this pattern? Where did the pattern come from? Is it important to order and build today in the West after this pattern? Just in case there is any doubt, we are not discussing buildings or organisations here!

If we were to ask different folk from various parts of the world and at different points in history to draw a plan of a dwelling house we would get very differing results according to the experience of the designers.

It would be very helpful if we could let our experience of what we think the local assembly appears to be like today vanish completely from our minds. Let’s start with a blank sheet, right at the beginning. The model most of us might be familiar with – buildings, programs, staff and budgets is not found in the New Testament record.

The Lord Jesus established the pattern for His pupils while he was with them. As he said; “I will build my assembly and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” This use of ‘ekklesia’ (literally called out) in a fighting or military context would give the sense to the hearers of a hand picked military unit, team or squad. In the armed forces at that time ekklesia could mean a squad, team or unit. Ekklesia was a very general term used in many contexts for a group, team or assembly.

Jesus spent the three years of his earthly ministry establishing His pattern and revealing it to the apostles.

Firstly Jesus had relationships with individual pupils whom he called to follow him. He did not merely say, “Believe on me and see you next Sunday.” When two men inquired where Jesus was staying he replied; “come and see.” He spent a lot of time in close company with His pupils. He also encouraged them to have one to one relationships with each other. It is recorded that Jesus had a particular pupil whom he loved, who leaned on the breast of Jesus at the Last Supper. This un-named pupil clearly had a special relationship with Jesus in a way that the others did not have. This would be very unfair if it was just favouritism and not for an example in relationships. The others asked this ‘loved disciple’ to ask Jesus questions, the way one does ask a friend who is especially close to someone else to inquire on their behalf. Perhaps it is because of this that he was the writer of love, as can be seen by his Gospel and his letters (ascribed traditionally and without foundation to John).

Peter and James and John appear to have been close friends. The apostles are listed in pairs. Jesus sent the twelve and later the seventy out in pairs. We may just think that this is a good idea for moral support, safety, and other practical reasons but I think the primary reason is to do with building genuine friendships. “Being knit together in love” as Paul describes it in many of his letters.

I lied about the tabernacle! In **Exodus 26:6** we read; “And you shall make fifty clasps of gold and couple the curtains together with the clasps, so that it may be one tabernacle.” Can we see the clasps of gold as a type of the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit clasping us together one to one to make the Body of Christ one complete whole? Without the clasps the tabernacle would have been just a pile of curtains. Without one to one relationships the body of Christ will be disjointed and malfunctioning.

This primary part of the pattern for the saints can be summed up as ‘brothers’. In **John 20:17** Jesus says to Mary; “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.’” If Jesus himself calls and regards us as His brothers how much more should we regard one another as brothers? While we may know that we are indeed brothers and sisters in Christ, how we relate to one another can be very sketchy, so that we act more like distant cousins. A five minute chat after a formal meeting does not equate to a relationship.

Jesus talks about one believer receiving another in **Matthew 10:40** where he says; “He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones a cup of cold water in the name of a pupil/disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.”

Again in Matthew chapter eighteen where the pupils want to know who is the most important, ‘the greatest’ in the kingdom of heaven. First he establishes that in the kingdom each person who humbles himself, is converted and becomes as a little child, who believes, is the greatest as far as his Father in heaven is concerned.

Jesus makes the point that whoever receives in his name one such ‘little one’ who believes in him receives Him, the Christ. He then goes on to warn against stumbling one of these ‘little ones’, emphasising the value such a one has to the Father.

Matthew 18:10 “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.” Having rescued each believer from the consequences of sin through the death of his Son on the cross each new-born lamb is so precious to the Father.

In consequence we have the privilege of having the possibility of receiving such a one who is so precious to Him whom we love. And the responsibility to see that we treat and esteem such a one accordingly. Receiving a particular individual brother or sister is the act of entering into a practical ongoing relationship with that person.

We may well wonder; “could he mean some of the believers I know?” They may not be very righteous. They may not be very loyal. They may appear to have little consideration for anyone but themselves. Perhaps they seem to be on a different planet. Anticipating our response, Jesus goes on to tell us how to handle perceived grievances between one brother and another. **Matthew 18:15** “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear you, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the assembly. But if he refuses even to hear the assembly, let him be to you as a heathen and a tax collector.” The ultimate object being to keep the matter as private as possible and to restore the relationship, rather than to sever it.

He goes on to say; **Matthew 18:19** “Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in

my name, I am there in the midst of them.” Fellowship and harmony being an important part of the keys to the Kingdom.

I did mention that I lied about the tabernacle, here is another reference. This echoes the Holy of Holies, the sacred heart of the tabernacle, within the veil. Here the priest would meet with God, to intercede for, or pray on behalf of, the people. All those who have believed on the Lord Jesus and are cleansed from sin through baptism in the name of Jesus and anointed with the Holy Spirit are priests to the Most High God. As Peter wrote in **1 Peter 2:5** “you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”; and **1 Peter 2:9** “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”

We serve God as priests when we serve one another, one to one, as Jesus amply taught as mentioned above and as taught by the writer of 1 John.

This central, serving function is the overall purpose of the tabernacle and of the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ. While a whole lot of other things went on in the tabernacle, with daily offerings, burning of incense, etcetera, its primary purpose was to provide a place where the priest could make the offering for the sins of the people. In the same way, while many good things may happen in the life of the local assembly, the centre is the individual’s relationship with the Father and with other brothers and sisters as manifested in service to one another. When we give an account to our Lord, the head of the Body, we won’t be questioned about theology, singing, attendance, appearance, how much money we donated, a whole lot of things in fact. We will be questioned about how we have treated one another. Whatever I do to a fellow son of God I do to Jesus. I can serve my Father through serving his son or daughter, my brother or sister.

We may in our human way of thinking look at the tabernacle and see first our point of entry, the outside court, then the tent of meeting, then the Holy Place. Conversely God looks first at his point of entry, the Holy Place, where the individual meets God through faith in His Son, then out to the tent of meeting, then finally out to the court of the tabernacle. As Jesus said, man looks on the outward appearance, but God sees what is at the heart of man. Similarly we tend to look at the public outward appearance of a group of believers, such as their public meetings if they have them, whereas God looks at the heart, that is each individual’s relationship with himself as demonstrated through serving relationships one with another.

Peter responded to Jesus, perhaps defensively, and asked how many times in a day he should forgive his brother. Peter didn’t want to be lumbered with a ‘problem brother’. It would be nice to have an escape clause. Jesus however makes it very clear that we have no option but to forgive our brother as many times as are necessary, so that our relationship can carry on. It helps if we receive one another as the unrighteous sinners we are, rather than have unrealistic expectations of one another, which are doomed to lead to disappointment and frustration. We can learn from this passage that Peter expected to be spending quite a bit of time with individual brothers.

All of the above is totally irrelevant to me if I don’t have one to one ‘brother’ relationships where I receive specific individuals as my brothers in Christ. No one would get the opportunity to offend me, or sin against me. I wouldn’t gather with them privately in Jesus name and agree concerning anything. We could not confess our faults one to another.

We may understandably adopt the defensive position of; ‘If I don’t make any close friends then I won’t fall out with anyone either’. But that won’t wash in the kingdom. We have received a direct commandment from our Lord Jesus to love one another and if we think we can do that by just keeping a low profile and out of the way while smiling and appearing friendly we are mistaken. The love of God sent his son to die for us while we were yet sinners. His love did not mean that he would just ignore us. Love is active, seeking opportunity to be involved and to do good to the person who is the object of that love.

This pattern of individual pupils being knit together in one to one relationships was carried on by the early saints. Peter exhorts in **1 Peter 3:8** “all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tender hearted, be courteous.” This cannot be done in formal meetings, but in community.

1 John is all about loving our brother, please read it all. It comes down to personal relationships with specific individuals, ‘walking in the light’.

This pattern of intimate personal relationships should be seen in any family if it is to be strong and able to withstand the knocks of adversity that come along. In a household it is important that each member builds relationships with the other members on a one to one basis. As a husband and father I need to spend ‘quality’ time with my wife, that is time alone with her without the distractions of other folks, and equally I need to spend ‘quality’ time with my son, when it is just him and me. The same goes for my wife needing to spend time alone with me and on other occasions time alone with our son. This way we have first hand, first quality relationships. In many ways it is communication that makes the relationship.

When I was a child at home with my family I had two brothers, one eighteen months older and one thirty months younger. We knew nothing about building relationships. However as I would spend a lot of time with my younger brother, playing games, talking, joking; we did develop a good close ‘brotherly’ relationship, which has stood the test of time and distance. On the other hand my older brother was a lot taller than me and never wanted to be seen outside with his little brother (me). He made a point of not spending time with me alone and apart from my other younger brother. As a consequence, to this day, sadly my older brother and I are not close. So though we are all three of us brothers, and spent a lot of time together in the home, how we chose to treat one another permanently affected the quality and depth of our relationships.

This is the choice we have as brothers in the family of God. We can choose to make a close relationship with a brother as equals, or to keep things at a polite, friendly, safe distance. If we get close, they may discover things about us we don’t want known. We may discover things about them that we don’t want to know. To be knit together in love involves seeking one another out and spending time one to one, having distinct relationships and cultivating them. However you accomplish it, it involves spending relaxed informal time alone together, praying together, talking together honestly and openly as brothers in Christ.

This sort of relationship does not just happen. In most cases relationships come about through one person approaching another. We can see a type of this in Jesus approaching individuals and calling them to follow him. Andrew went and found Simon his brother, told him about Jesus and brought him with him to Jesus. Philip went and found his friend Nathaniel and brought him to Jesus.

We all have our relationship with God because He called us; He approached us out of His love for us. For most of us it would be futile to hang about hoping to ‘get lucky’ and have some brother approach us - we have got to get up and do the approaching. If we are passive by nature then we will have to start being ‘pro-active’, which is taking the initiative. While there is a time for being still and knowing that He is God, there are also lots of times for getting up and doing something practical!

In the book of Acts chapter nine we read that Barnabus took Saul and introduced him to the assembly at Jerusalem. Everyone else was afraid of Saul. Later, after Saul had been sent off to Tarsus to avoid the Greeks who were after his blood, Barnabus went to Tarsus to ‘seek Saul’ and bring him back to Antioch with him. So we should make it our business to seek out another brother or sister and attempt to engage in an honest open relationship with them based on our mutual relationship with our heavenly Father and a mutual desire to be pupils of Christ.

This last part is very important, that the other party also is born of the Spirit and wants to be a pupil of Jesus, whatever the cost. Otherwise you will not be agreed and the relationship would be just a natural friendship. Friendship is great, but we are looking at more than friendship here.

In Matthew, which we have already referred to, Jesus is teaching His pupils about the value of individuals in the kingdom. **Matthew 18:12** he asks; “What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains and seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that one than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.” Jesus then goes on to give instruction on how to handle grievances between brothers. Probably like me you may associate this little story with a gospel message. However the context within which Jesus was speaking here is one of the importance of each individual believer to God and our attitude to them. As he started off by saying; “whoever receives one little child like this (who believes in me) receives me.”

Paul also wrote; **Romans 15:7** Wherefore receive one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God. The Greek word here translated ‘receive’ could be better translated as grasp, lay hold of, reach out and grab!

You may have followed me up to this point thinking; “This seems okay, I wouldn’t mind such a relationship, but I can’t think of any other believer who would want to join with me in this way.” May I suggest we view every brother or sister as a ‘little one’ in the eyes of our Father, no matter what they may appear to be like? It may help to motivate us if we view this basic knitting together as an opportunity to bless another believer, as well as an opportunity to be greatly blessed ourselves. We are commanded to receive one another, as Christ received us. He received us, (Greek katalabanw) that is, grasped, grabbed hold off us. He was motivated by love.

This is how the Body is to be knit together in love. This is the way in which we can obey Christ’s new commandment, that we love one another as he has loved us. How has he loved us? He sought us out. He made himself known to us. He invited us to know him. He shares our lives with us. He cares about every aspect of our lives; his desire for us is that we prosper, even as our souls prosper. How did he love the twelve he spent three years with? He spent time in their exclusive company. He talked with them and listened to them. He shared meals with them. He let them know what he was doing. He washed their feet.

If we are servants of the one who bought us with his blood surely his commandment is not an option. Let us make every effort then to be obedient and well pleasing to our Master in putting his instructions into effect. By this all men will know that we are his pupils, if we have love one for another.

CHAPTER 10: THE PATTERN PART 2 – FAMILIES

Mark 10:29 And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.

How well we put one to one relationships into practice in the assembly affects the quality of the next part of the pattern, the family size group.

Jesus chose twelve 'that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach' as it is written in Mark's gospel chapter three. It is not without reason that Jesus chose two pairs of natural brothers, Peter and Andrew, John and James, besides a pair of close friends, Philip and Nathaniel. The twelve were to be his new family unit for the next three years. When he was in a house with his pupils and people came to tell him that his mother and brothers were outside wanting to see him he replied; "Who is my mother, or my brothers?" And looking around him in a circle at those who sat about him he said; "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister and my mother."

In Psalm sixty-eight it is written; "God sets the solitary in families." Families are God's idea. Families work as social units where the weak can be cared for by the strong and each individual contributes and receives. In families we learn how to behave towards one another, we learn social and practical skills. Here we have the security in which first steps can be taken. Children are taught how to take care of themselves. Parents learn to be responsible, gracious and forgiving. Families should make us well-rounded personalities with the basic skills needed to survive. Families also eventually naturally produce other generations of families.

While it may nice to think of the whole assembly as one big family, this would not be helpful nor indeed be following the pattern that Jesus laid down. Perhaps we could think of the larger group as relatives. Jesus chose twelve out of a much larger group of His pupils to be a model family unit. There is a useful limit to the size of a family. I am glad that I did not grow up in a family of twenty. In such a large family some individuals would be sure to suffer the effects of neglect. Children from institutional homes, like orphanages, where the unit size may be too large, could suffer emotionally and in development as a result. In the small family sized group we can be careful with each individual child to ensure he or she gets enough personal attention.

The family unit would consist of a small group of believers at different stages of spiritual growth and of differing abilities. A good size would be the same as a natural family, that is anything between three and up to twelve, or whatever number can get round the table and that can actually be involved with one another practically.

It would be natural for this unit to grow gradually from an initial two or three. As individuals matured and made their own relationships with others outside the family group they would leave and form further groups in turn.

My wife and I were unable to have children of our own. While we were young this wasn't too great a problem. It would have been nice to have children but we had a good social life instead. This was fine until we reached our early thirties when the appreciation of just what we were missing grew until it became uncomfortable. God has made us, and designed marriage, with a view to procreation and nurturing of children. We felt increasingly the fact that something was missing and this drove us to make a further attempt at adoption. We had been turned down eight years earlier by an adoption agency we had approached. This time God graciously helped us to be accepted as prospective parents and we got a beautiful blond blue eyed baby son who slept right through the nights. This changed things. Our social life became less active but in its place we had family life. Both things are part of a balanced life.

Up to this period my assembly life was what I would describe as at a social level. I had close colleagues at the organisation and we did lots of things together, outings, prayer meetings, evangelism, prison visiting, elder's meetings, meals together etc. Soon after we started to enjoy a family level as well. After being shown that I had not been a disciple of Jesus, repenting and becoming a pupil of Jesus I began to make relationships with a few brothers one to one. We spent time together and became knit together as in a family unit. In a balanced spiritual life we need both a family style and social level of life.

In the early part of the book of Acts we are informed that those who believed continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with the people. Whereas we may have been tempted to keep the folks together in one large gathering as much as possible and avoid splitting up folks into small groups, this is exactly what the early saints did. I like the way that meal times is central to the corporate life of those believers. In most natural families the table is the one focal point at which the whole family is likely to gather. Each member may have their own duties to perform which separate them during the day, but at mealtimes all who are able come together at the table.

At the table, besides eating, which can be very pleasurable and is certainly essential, the family can swap stories, the day's experiences and concerns; and make plans. Unfortunately it is also an opportunity for damage to be done. In the home it can be an occasion of argument and dissension. There are times when wisdom is needed to diffuse a potentially destructive situation. Both Peter and Jude in their letters mention the danger of false teachers being present at the collective meal or 'feast'. This illustrates the point that the times together round the meal table were the occasions at which teaching, encouragement, and the other gifts would have been expected to be used. This is meant to be the norm for pupils of the Lord Jesus Christ, today.

The gathering around a table is also an obvious occasion for breaking bread together and remembering the Lord's death, as did those early believers. The Passover meal was meant to be eaten by a family, or if one family was too small, by two families together. Jesus kept the Passover with the twelve and others, his 'family' at the time and commanded that they did so in future in remembrance of him. It is significant that it was a real substantial supper or meal and that the bread was broken and shared out at the beginning of the meal and the cup taken after the meal. The point being that there was a meal with conversation in between! This is further shown by Paul's references in the eleventh chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians. His point was that folk were arriving and going ahead eating on their own because they were hungry and not waiting for the others to share in the meal. It is a great sadness to me that what should be a genuine time of relaxed pleasant conversation over a pooled meal has become reduced to a ceremony or ritual. It looks like some of the Corinthians may have been already half way there!

Matthew 28:18 Then Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make pupils of all the nations, immersing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you:"

Included in the 'all things that I have commanded you' is the way that we, the local assembly, should meet together around the Lord's Supper, as instituted by the Christ on the night he was betrayed. So important is the manner in which we ought to meet that Jesus gave the same instructions to Paul by revelation. This is recorded in **1 Corinthians 11: 23-26** "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which he was betrayed took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "Take eat; this is my body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same manner he also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." This would not have come across as strange to those at supper with Jesus, as at that time there was a custom among the Jews of holding a meal in honour of a loved relative who had died. This is mentioned in **Jeremiah 16:7** 'Nor shall men break bread in mourning for them, to comfort them for the dead; nor shall men give them the cup of consolation to drink for their father or their mother.' I enquired of Torah online and

eventually they came back with the information that from the time prior to Jeremiah up to about 500AD the Jews maintained this practise. Hence it was not a case of Jesus introducing a new religious ritual but of commanding His pupils to 'do this in remembrance of me.'

If we read all of 1 Corinthians we will notice that the assembling of the saints together is clearly associated with eating the Lord's Supper. See **1 Corinthians 5:7-8, 1 Corinthians 10:16-21 and 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.**

Acts 20:7 "Now on the first day of the week, when we (in Nestle text) came together to break bread." This implies that the saints were in the habit of regularly assembling for the Lord's Supper meal and meeting. In the scriptures the day begins and ends in the evening. So Sabbath begins on the evening of the sixth day, what we call Friday evening, and ends evening of seventh day, what we call Saturday evening. The Lord's Day begins where the Sabbath ends, what we call Saturday evening. This was of significance to the Jews, as a big party every first day evening was sure to get noticed, as they had just had their special enlarged family meal on the Sabbath evening (Our Friday). Man is not made for the Sabbath nor the Lord's Day, but both are made for men.

Jewish friends will say that they do not study theology, they eat it! That is, much of what is eaten at the various feasts and holidays have spiritual significance and teaching in them. For example look at the Passover meal, lamb, bitter herbs, unleavened bread, all are shadows and types.

At the time of the tabernacle Israel was instructed to pass on the commandments with the teaching being from parents to children and grandchildren. It wasn't to be left to professionals. As Moses commanded in **Deuteronomy 4:9** "Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren, especially concerning the day you stood before the Lord your God in Horeb, when the Lord said to me, 'Gather the people to me, and I will let them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.'" An important part of Jewish culture to this day is the teaching of their children at the meal table.

In Acts we see simultaneously the apostles and evangelists doing the work of evangelism on one hand and on the other the assemblies continuing in the teaching of the apostles, in community with each other, sharing, breaking bread together (the Lord's supper) and prayers.

So we should note this passage is about the work of evangelism when we read;

Act 19:8 And he went into the synagogue, and spoke boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened, and believed not, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

The above passage describes Paul's outreach work in preaching the good message of the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. For this he needed a hall where those interested could come and hear in peace.

The gatherings of the disciples for mutual edification, the body of Jesus Christ, building itself up in love, took place in a completely different way, different location and on a different basis because it was to a different purpose.

Teaching on how the assembly needed to continue in order to build itself up in love was deliberate and a continuance of the teaching of Jesus to His original disciples when he was with them before Calvary. Paul similarly delivered teaching or customs that were good for the new local assemblies to follow. Essentially they were the same teachings as the apostles to the Jerusalem assembly. We can get a good indication of these in Paul's letter to the assembly at Corinth.

1Corinthians 1:2 To the assembly of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

1Corinthians 1:9 God *is* faithful, by whom you were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Now I beseech you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

1Corinthians 3:10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds upon it. But let every man take heed how he builds thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (This foundation is Christ in the individual disciples and the pattern of community and service one to another in the local assembly of the disciples.)

1Corinthians 3:16 Don't you know that you all collectively are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you all? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are collectively.

1Corinthians 4:16 Wherefore I rege you, imitate me. For this cause have I sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every assembly.

In the following passage Paul is concerned for the purity of the body of Christ as it assembles at the Lord's Table, which was the usual form of weekly meeting for the local disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1Corinthians 10:1 Moreover, brethren, I would not that you should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be idolaters, as *were* some of them; as it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear *it*. Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we *being* many are one bread, *and* one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What say I then? That the idol is anything, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is anything? But *I say*, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that you should have fellowship with devils. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: you cannot be partakers of the Lord's Table and of the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

1Jn 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen *it*, and bear witness, and show to you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we to you, that you also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. The regular sharing house to house of the Lord's Supper was an occasion where this would be put into practice.

In the following Paul seeks to correct abuses taking place at the weekly gathering around the Lord's Table both in the sharing of the supper and in the subsequent time together. Note Paul didn't advise abandoning this weekly gathering in spite of their particular problems at the time.

1Corinthians 11:17 Now in this that I declare *to you* I praise *you* not, that you come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together in the assembly, I hear that there are divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also divisions among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. When you come together therefore into one place, *this* is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating everyone takes before the *other* his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have you not houses to eat and to drink in? or do you despise the assembly of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise *you* not. For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup. For he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. Wherefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait one for another. And if any man hungers, let him eat at home; that you come not together unto condemnation.

This shows that this gathering of the company of disciples was to have a meal together; where they would deliberately break bread in remembrance of the body of Jesus, eat the communal meal and then share the cup of the Lord in remembrance of his shed blood.

The following refers to the rest of the evening assembled together for mutual edification, the body building up itself in love, from that which every joint supplies.

Ephesians 2:19 Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; In whom all the building fitly framed together grows unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom you also are built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

1Corinthians 12:1 Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I would not have you be ignorant. You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, even as you were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed: and *that* no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another *divers* kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these works that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also *is* Christ. For by one Spirit are we were all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have all been made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole

body *were* an eye, where *were* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *were* the smelling? But now God has set the members every one of them in the body, as it has pleased him. And if they were all one member, where *were* the body? But now *are they* many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of you: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. No, much more those members of the body, which seem to be the more feeble, are necessary: And those *members* of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely *parts* have more abundant comeliness. For our comely *parts* have no need: but God has tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that *part* which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but *that* the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the assembly, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. *Are* all apostles? *are* all prophets? *are* all teachers? *are* all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet I show to you a more excellent way. (Love)

1 Corinthians 14:39 Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.

Both Peter and Jude in their letters mention the danger of false teachers being present at the collective meal or 'feast'.

Jude 1:12 These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds *they are* without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withers, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;

This helps illustrate the point that the times together round the meal table after breaking bread were occasions at which teaching, encouragement, and the other gifts would have been expected to be used. This is still meant to be the norm for the assembly of disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ today.

Matthew 28:18 Then Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, immersing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you:"

Included in the 'all things that I have commanded you' is the way that we, the local assembly of disciples of the Lord Jesus, should meet together around the Lord's Supper, as instituted by the Christ on the night he was betrayed. So important is the manner in which we ought to meet that Jesus gave the same instructions to Paul by revelation. This is recorded in 1 Corinthians 11.

At the weekly gathering around the Lord's Table, just as each would bring a material portion to share (food and drink), so each had a spiritual portion to share according to the gifting of the Spirit, and all was to be done in love, decently and in order, to the building up and encouraging of one another. Just as no one individual owned the food, so no individual could claim ownership of the spiritual ministry. All was provided from Christ through the members of the gathered assembly and the meal was 'in common' or shared; the true meaning of communion.

It is not just the bread and wine but the companionship around the meal, plus the logistics of house to house that have implications for the nature of the local assembly. That it is relational and organic, each member dependent on the life that comes from the Head, without room for dead institution. All had opportunity and were actively encouraged to participate as the Lord had given them to share. It was a place for their children to learn important truths.

Jesus did not institute the Lord's Supper casually. It wasn't just a suggestion. It is life and health to those who participate according to the way He has ordained. If we observe the things that He has commanded us in this matter of meeting together it will be life and health to us. If we do not assemble together as commanded to correctly share in breaking bread and mutual ministry then 'many shall be weak and sick among us, and some will sleep'. **1 Corinthians 11:30.**

The Lord's Table is the gathering of those born of the Spirit around Jesus. No one who is not born of the Spirit is a part of this assembly and could not be expected to serve in spiritual gifts. The Lord's Supper is a gathering to 'eat' Jesus. He gives us Himself at this feast through the Spirit!

Why is it that this is not the normal pattern of assembling today?

The problem could be that those concerned with evangelism, apostles and evangelists, are so focused on creating a meeting that will attract as many people as possible to one venue at one time. Of having everyone sit audience style in rows while they and other 'staff' address them from a platform. The better the surroundings, the more inspirational the Music and singing, the more charismatic the speaker, the better. All this is fine for evangelism and some other special occasions but it is not suitable to meeting the need of the local assembly of disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ in building itself up in love, each member supplying its own special service to the whole body.

It is like applying an 'ox cart of the Philistines' method to transport the ark of the covenant instead of obeying God's instructions as delivered to Moses regarding the Levites carrying it on their shoulders. See 1 Samuel 6.

It is copying the methods of state sponsored institutional religion instead of going back to the original commands of the Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching of the apostles as clearly shown in the scriptures.

Consequently in the theatre style meetings the 'ordinary members' learn how to be a good audience, while the evangelist or 'minister' has to be a Jack of all trades, preaching the gospel, encouraging the saints at the same time. The only place to go from being in the audience is to get onto the platform. Evangelistic work can benefit from some organisation, as Paul with his team including other apostles and those who assisted them. When this is applied to the local assembly it becomes something of a top – down performance rather than the community of Christ's disciples.

CHAPTER 11: THE PATTERN PART 3 - THE OUTER COURTS

Jesus spent a lot of his time through the ministry years engaged in public ministry. He taught, healed and cast out evil spirits in the synagogues and in homes throughout Galilee. Crowds would throng him looking for healing and deliverance from demons. Bear in mind the climate in Judea and you will understand why he would often be inside a house while the crowds thronged outside. I have lived in southern Spain and you can't stand outside in the sun for long during the day. Sunset is a different matter and at that time of day Jesus would often be outside healing and teaching the multitudes. Soon however Jesus was not allowed a moment's peace and he was effectively engaged in public ministry wherever the crowds could access him. The hallmark of his public ministry was that he went through every city and village! Jesus did not plant a location for the people to come to. He went to them. You can't stand still and sow seed!

Jesus then called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. So they departed and went through the towns, preaching the message of the kingdom and everywhere healing the sick in the name of the Lord Jesus. Similarly later Jesus sent out the seventy-two. The evangelists went out to meet the public where they were.

In Acts we read; "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple." The outer court of the temple was the place in Jerusalem where devout Jews went to pray at set hours and lots of people would be there most of the day. The disciples would gather with the apostles in Solomon's Porch in the temple, where the good news was announced to the crowds and many signs and wonders were done among the people. Just as with Jesus, soon the apostles were attracting a crowd wherever they went, even in the streets on their way. Even after being imprisoned, the next day they were back early in the morning, teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

In this way the public meetings were just that, opportunities taken to meet the public and proclaim the Good News of Jesus the Christ. Too often what passes for a public meeting today is more like a private meeting to which the public are invited. The early saints had their own needs met mostly house to house in smaller, more intimate gatherings and then they went out to the public wherever they were. They went to the synagogues, courts of the Temple precinct, public places of prayer, public speaking places, marketplaces, throughout the villages.

A telling phrase in the book of Acts is "many joined the disciples/pupils." The public places were where the people heard, believed and joined the disciples. It was the interface between the disciples and those they were endeavouring to reach with the message of repentance and remission of sins in the name of the Lord Jesus, the Christ. The desired result was that folk should hear the whole message, believe on Jesus, truly repent and be immersed in his name for remission of sins, be filled with the Holy Spirit and become joined to the rest.

If you are wondering how could our current public meetings ever become like those in the New Testament, the answer is that they couldn't. Most modern public gatherings seem to be a hybrid, often still called a service, a mixture of a private and public nature. Often praise and music features strongly, prayer, Bible reading, teaching, all indicative of a meeting for believers. At the same time this meeting may be the main means of preaching the message of faith in the Christ to the lost, as indeed there may be a number of folk present who have not as yet truly believed on the Lord. This can result in it not being a satisfactory form of either. It may end up not a good meeting for believers, without any real opportunities for them to make a contribution. Nor an effective outreach. Part of the meeting may treat everyone as if they were believers and the other part may treat everyone as if they were not saved!

The early apostles and evangelists went to preach the message of Jesus to the lost where they were. This would lead to local assemblies formed in those localities. The newly immersed and empowered disciples became the local body of Christ, encouraged to be knit together in love and be ministers of Christ to one another. The new-born pupils of Christ could then be left to the safety of the local body and the Spirit in one another.

People often tell me that they are disappointed with the lack of true relationships within their organisation and that it would be nice to have them. But they don't see it as being essential. This is because the established pattern is upside down. First priority is the public meetings on Sunday. These are promoted as being what believing is all about. Then house groups are nice, if you can get along. Then making friends of those who go to these meetings is a bonus. We are suffering from eighteen hundred years of the wrong pattern. It is like looking through a telescope at the wrong end.

As things are upside down we seem to have been tempted often to try and make reforms at the wrong end, that is, at the Public meeting end. The correct place for reformation is at the base, with true repentance, remission of sins, living faith in Jesus, and two and three fellowship. Then we can have sound and useful family unit fellowship without clergy/laity distinctions and ultimately really public events proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. If we get back to community, breaking bread house to house and the prayers as in Acts 2, then anything else that seems good to the Spirit and the local body will be fine as well. The DNA of the church is the Christ, his life within the saints. He is the pattern, imprinted on our hearts by the Spirit. Jesus is the architect, we are the living stones.

CHAPTER 12: PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

Modern western lifestyles, especially those typical of Northern Europe, do not make it easy or natural to live out the pattern of community taught by Christ and lived by His early pupils. In fact the lifestyles imposed on us city dwellers direct us to insularity and self-sufficiency. Typically, if in employment, this means an early, hurried start to the day. Travelling virtually alone to work. Working alongside other people perhaps but not being close in a personal way. The return journey home, then seeking an opportunity for rest, looking for personal space, keeping contacts lightweight and not exposing oneself easily. Possibly with a TV in the corner of the room for company and stimulus.

In this environment the pseudo cell can easily bloom. A regularly scheduled meeting. Clearly defined limits of involvement. Knowing one can always withdraw if one needs to. This shallow kind of group can be the default product of our city life conditioning. The praise time may go well. The prayers may take off. There may be a real sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit, with folk sharing as inspired. So what's my problem then?

The problem can be that meetings themselves are not the issue. Community between members of the family unit is the foundational issue, and many of our models of community are faulted by our city experiences.

The work of the Spirit is manifest in spreading community through the shedding of God's love in our hearts. This comes out in works of love, primarily receiving (grasping) one another as Jesus receives (grasps) us. God has adopted us and he empowers us to adopt one another.

As city life tends to the erosion of family life and ties, it also erodes our spiritual family unit life. Expectations are lowered. Commitments are 'adjusted'. We may easily only ever see fellow believers at meetings we commute to!

Enough bad news. How about some answers. The Holy Spirit has been shed abroad in our hearts to enable us with his love and his family values. This love moves us to make adjustments to our lives. Adjusting our values so we see individuals as important. Adjusting how our time is consumed. This should mean fewer meetings and more encounters with others.

The Holy Spirit has come writing his law on our hearts. Faith reads this law and puts it into effect. Faith without works is dead. Love without works is not love. Faith without works is unbelief. The Spirit has not come to ensure great meetings. He has come to enable genuine community; with our co-operation.

In Acts there isn't a lot written about believers meetings, but the community of the saints is well documented. When the unbelievers saw how they loved one another they knew that they were the disciples/pupils of Jesus. 'Greater love has no man than this; that he lay down his life for his friends. And you are my friends if you do what I command you, that you love one another as I have loved you.'

Sharing in practical jobs and chores is a good way to be together without it being a 'meeting'. A group of the disciples/pupils went fishing together shortly after Christ was resurrected. I am sure that the early saints did not just break bread (eat) together, but baked bread (worked) together also.

Housewives could house work together. In the early days of my experience of community I mowed the lawn of a brother who didn't possess a lawn mower. Some of us helped decorate a house and did gardening together. Two baby-sitting can have a good time together. Sharing in meals like breakfast before work, lunches, coffee breaks, sports and walks are great for getting to know and love one another.

I am just throwing out some examples here. Obviously each of us have differing circumstances and should be able to find some appropriate activities we can share with those we are seeking to be in fellowship with locally. It is good to resist the temptation to lump folks together into as large a group as possible. A number of separate

gatherings with fewer folks in each would actually increase the level of community. Let's be spontaneous and go for twos and threes at short notice.

All meetings is not fellowship. All leisure activities is not fellowship. All work is not fellowship. Fellowship entails a good mixture of all of life's aspects. Then we can laugh with those who laugh, weep with those who weep and mourn with those who mourn. In intimate moments we confess our sins one to another, share hopes and fears and have opportunity to encourage and support each other.

A common trap for those genuinely seeking to serve the Lord is to get caught up in far too many meetings and events. Before we know it, there just isn't any time left for casual or planned one to one, face to face fellowship.

In many less developed cultures it is common for folks to live in and work in a communal setting. The local washing place where everyone does the washing of clothes. The village water well or pump. Sharing in agricultural activities like harvesting and planting. Communal celebrations like a wedding where the whole community may be involved. In contrast we have high rise apartments, TV, books, computers, security systems, private cars, many things that tend to make us self sufficient and insular. Many believers commute to an often distant venue for 'meetings'. The particular venue may be selected on the basis of music preference, teaching style preference, friends who happen to go there. So if we want community we have no option but to engineer it. It is worth bearing in mind that we are not just 'stones' in the temple of God, but builders in his house, which is the assembly. Let us then be careful how we build; to build with silver, gold and precious stones, rather than wood, hay and straw.

We may be happy to think of ourselves as stones - passive objects in the hands of God for him to place us where he wills. Embracing the fact that we are builders also and will receive rewards according to how we build may be more disturbing. However the gospel is meant to be disturbing - or challenging. It is a fact though that we do have to build community, using the gifts God has given us to that end.

The second commandment, that we should love our neighbour as ourselves, can provoke a defensive response such as that given to Jesus by the young man, 'Who is my neighbour?'

This led to Jesus telling the story of the 'good' Samaritan. A very revealing story with regard to our possible attitudes to getting involved with others. It could get messy. You don't know where it might end. It could involve expense and precious time. We may have plenty of religious reasons not to become involved. We'd love to stop and help but we have a choir practise and we're late already! Doubtless the Samaritan had pressing appointments as he was passing the wounded traveller, but he put them aside. If we are too busy, we will have to put some things aside. This is preferable to our Lord putting us aside.

I have meetings to get to, people to see.

I have to be careful not to get side tracked from my 'spiritual' duties.

Jesus makes it plain that it is what we do and not what we believe that he judges. It is hearing his commandment and doing it that builds us on the rock, not just hearing. Please take the time to read 1 John. As it is written in the third chapter; 'Let us not love in word and speech only, but in (practical) deeds'. This is bearing fruits worthy of repentance.

Over to us.

CHAPTER 13: "WE'D LIKE YOU TO HOLD DOWN A LEG"

It was September 1982 on a Sunday night at around ten o'clock when the telephone rang. It was the pastor and he apologised for ringing so late. We had just gotten back home at nine o'clock from the Sunday evening meeting with our twelve-month-old son.

"Colin, could you possibly come down to the vestry now? We have a lady here who needs help and we think that it would be good if you were here to help us."

It sounded very intriguing and flattering. Obviously an emergency that needed my special skills. I wasn't an elder for nothing. Recognition at last!

But before describing what happened next perhaps I had better fill in the background to these events. Names have been changed to protect everyone.

Dave the new pastor of our young assembly and his wife Marj had been off to America with their son Andrew and James the pastor of their son's place. They had been visiting some groups in New England and 'ministering' to them. Our pastor was a very good singer and a decent preacher so we naturally assumed it was a singing and preaching sort of trip.

Prior to this trip Dave had been suffering with terrible headaches and had appeared to me to be rather melancholic.

At the first elder's meeting after their return Dave tells the other elder Paul and I in general terms what a wonderful time they've had. And that our town has a big demon hovering over it called Juniper! This fact has been brought to light through a gift of knowledge! The name of this demon means Slippery or Greasy we were assured and he was responsible for leaders of the church organisations in the area being 'under attack'. Dave says he thinks it would be a good idea for the whole congregation to pray against it and bind it in prayer. I look at Paul and spot a bemused expression suggesting the thought 'what the heck is happening'. After pointing out to Dave that some of our folk were residents at a local mental institution; and telling them that there is a big daddy of an evil demon hovering over the town may not do them any good; we agree not to make it an issue for prayer at the prayer meeting! Dave though is obviously not completely happy as he hasn't achieved his purpose. I try to encourage Dave with the fact that we are more than conquerors through Christ and that the Devil himself has nothing on those who have been bought with the blood of Jesus.

A month later at the next elder's meeting Dave suggests it would be a good idea to have James and Andrew come to our place to conduct some special meetings geared at encouraging the saints. Paul and I readily agree as we had been sharing concern with Dave that we should be linked tangibly with other ministering brothers.

Within a few weeks James and Andrew arrive for a special weekend of meetings, along with their team of two other guys and two women. James was very enthusiastic and brusque and drove the congregation along in praise and worship. He was so enthusiastic several visitors took offence and walked out. A very competent speaker, the theme was meaning business for God and re-dedication. Generally he went down very well.

Sunday morning was slightly different. One of the female members of the team, Dave's daughter in law, delivered a scathing denunciation of some unnamed person in the congregation during the prayer time. (Always a good opportunity to make a point, starting as prayer, ending as a word of knowledge or prophecy.) Naturally this would have a lot of folk wondering who the rat was. "Could it be me?" was probably going through a lot of minds. I remember thinking that this was definitely not of God, but then you can get a lot of that sort of thing in some circles.

That Sunday afternoon I received a phone call from Dave. He asked me if I would go to his house as the team were praying together and they thought it would be good for me to be there. Dutifully I went and was ushered into the lounge where 'the team' was sitting around the room on dining chairs and I was asked to sit on the settee. After a few pleasantries James asked me if I believed that a Christian could have an evil spirit. I replied that I had no idea, as it wasn't something I had ever needed to think about. But I supposed it might be possible, I really didn't know.

James then asked if I believed it could be possible that I might have an evil spirit. Again I replied that I genuinely had no idea, but it may have been possible for all I knew. James then asked me if I'd mind if they prayed for me, to which I agreed.

This was like a cue for action in a Hollywood movie. Andrew was in one corner with an open dictionary. A lady called June who had been referred to as being a prophetess sat in the opposite corner with hands on thighs and eyes closed. The rest got up and closed in around me. June spoke. "I am getting the word Adamant." Andrew hurriedly looked up the word adamant in the dictionary. "Adamant; hard, stubborn, unyielding, having the properties of diamond." James then asked me in a sympathetic tone. "Does this sound like anything in your life, Colin?"

I thought for a bit and replied that when I was young I could be unyielding when it came to matters of principal. Hardly had the words come out of my mouth when all present started crying out very loudly for this 'evil spirit' called Adamant to come out from me. I was still seated on the settee with head bowed and I could feel James hands on my head and could see June holding a bible up to my head as if it were a crucifix and I was Dracula. As if at some unseen signal everyone started praising God that the 'spirit' had gone and resumed their positions with an air of relief and victory.

After a few more moments June said "I am getting the word Impotent." James asked if I could think of any way this might be relevant to me. I replied that I couldn't really, except that I wasn't able to have children. From the reaction I am sure they were confusing impotence with infertility. Anyway they obviously wrongly thought that I was sexually impotent and started driving out the 'spirit' called Impotent with renewed vigour. After another brief spell of loud crying out, commanding the 'spirit' to go and waving the bible at me, they concluded that this too was gone with beaming smiles all round.

I was smiling too, out of relief that it was over. Dave told me how he'd had a spirit of witchcraft, which he'd had since birth as his grandparents had dabbled in spiritualism. But praise God, this had been driven out and they were now all wanting to continue this ministry as many folks were affected by such things.

I went home quite confused but confident that if I had had evil spirits they were gone now and if I hadn't then it wouldn't have done any harm.

The meeting that evening was an upbeat evangelical gospel and encouraging affair with most folks well pleased. We went home to put our little boy to bed. Jeanette, my wife, was feeling pretty uneasy about what was going on with the 'Team'.

Which brings us to where we came in.

In response to Dave's call I went down to the building and into the vestry. Chairs were placed around the room and the team was there with Dave and his wife as it had been at their home earlier that day. In the hot seat was Nicky, a woman in her late thirties who had been married twice and was living with her current boyfriend, whom she later married. Everyone was relaxed and friendly and chatting quietly, waiting for my arrival. I was briefed about the situation. Nicky apparently needed deliverance from several spirits, some of which were quite obstinate. I could help by holding down a leg. Really! I should add she was wearing jeans and motorbike boots at the time.

Things got rolling again when June said she had the word 'Lasciviousness'. Bemused but compliant I accordingly held a leg while everyone else was yelling at the 'demon' to leave Nicky in the name of Jesus. Someone else was holding Nicky's other leg while another person embraced her to keep her arms from flailing about. It was like a scene from a Victorian melodrama. Nicky had really entered into the part with thrashing around and rolling of eyes until the pronouncement that this 'spirit' too had been driven out.

During the holding down of the leg I felt very calm in my spirit but began to feel nauseous. I was neither excited nor alarmed. When I was no longer needed to hold the leg I went to the toilet as I was sure I would vomit.

On returning to the room I told them that I had just been to the toilet as I had felt as if I was going to vomit. James informed me that this could be a reaction to the presence of an evil spirit. I never really came to a satisfactory reason why I should have felt so nauseous but I later thought that if it was in reaction to an evil spirit then it was possibly to the spirit in June, the so called prophetess. But I returned home with the peace of God, knowing that whatever else had been going on the Holy Spirit had been protecting me from voyeurism and fear.

Why relate this experience? Because it is not extraordinary by any means and the culture of the charismatic set in Britain has been pervaded since 1980 with such 'demonising' and associated ascribing of anything that goes wrong with the devil and with demons.

Partly because I didn't embrace this diagnosing and casting out of demons with glee I was shortly asked to 'withdraw from the fellowship'.

Once the pastor and his wife had been brought on board 'the team' they went through most of the gullible members while keeping clear of those who were obviously not going to go along with this new 'ministry'. A pregnant young lady was informed that she had some evil spirit by the name of a human characteristic. However they told her that they couldn't cast out the demon until after the birth of the child as it may harm the unborn baby. You can imagine the distress and anxiety this caused the young woman.

An older lady with a history of serious stomach ulcers was told she had a demon and she came to see me to ask what she should do. Should she let the pastor and his wife pray for her? She was very distressed and her condition had worsened considerably. I advised that she probably did not have any such demons but that it would do no harm to let Dave and Marj pray for her. If she had no demon at least they would be happy with yet another 'success'.

Although we were no longer attending the assembly, as these folk were coming to me in considerable distress I contacted the Assemblies of God regional committee who were very sorry but as each assembly was independent they couldn't intervene. I subsequently found out that this vogue for diagnosing believers as having evil spirits and casting them out behind closed doors was affecting most Pentecostal and charismatic circles to some degree.

The attraction is obvious. Here at last is apparently a tangible demonstration of spiritual power. After so many years of simply "trust and obey" here is some action at last. And so easy. All you need is a compliant 'patient' to diagnose. And the diagnosis is 'spiritually discerned'. Casting out the demon is no problem. No problem that is so long as there really is no demon to contend with. It stood out a mile that when the team were conducting their 'casting out' campaign they kept well away from those people there with obvious real spiritual problems. These were the sort of folk who would give you a headache just talking to them for five minutes. People whose lives were clearly affected. People like the cases in the New Testament where the fact they were demon possessed was clear and known to everyone.

Another attraction is that to be known to have such a ministry as discernment of spirits or casting out demons re-enforces authority within one's group. The casting out of demons from the pastor had been the foundation of the authority and subsequent control by James and June, the self-styled apostle and prophetess. They had tried the same thing on me, as I was in the position of being the elder with most personal influence in the church due to having been there from the beginning and having real relationships with most of the folks. From their point of view they had to either bring me on board or to get rid of me. I subsequently discovered that by these means they had effective control over many groups in various countries.

Also it is exciting stuff - discerning spirits and casting them out in Jesus name! Fine if it were genuine, a dangerous addictive distraction and obsession when it is not genuine.

For me the worst affect it has had on those involved is the standing afforded to the devil and to evil spirits. The devil is elevated from the defeated foe he is to a monster just over our shoulder waiting to pounce.

In the savannah the roaring lion going about seeking whom he may devour preys on the stragglers, the old and the infirm. Hence Peter's injunction to the elders that they keep sober and vigilant in connection with the flock of God. Peter enjoins the flock to resist the devil in the context of sticking together, getting on with one another in humility. An isolated lamb cannot resist a lion. A lion will finish off a lamb instantly. We are not lambs for the devil to slaughter. In the context of the devil to us while we are in Christ and walking in fellowship with one another he is a pussy cat and we are more than conquerors through Christ. If we submit to God we can resist the devil and he will flee from us.

Jesus had this to say. "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he (the unclean spirit) goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came'. And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself and they enter and dwell there; and the latter state of that man is worse than the first." The message is to be being filled with the Holy Spirit. Obviously no evil spirit can inhabit the temple of God while the rightful tenant is there. A big part of Christ's ministry on earth was that he went about casting out evil spirits. It was a sign and evidence to the fact that the kingdom of God had come to them. As Jesus said; "But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you." How much more when the Holy Spirit comes and dwells in our hearts will any evil spirit flee from his mighty presence?

The point is, we have nothing to fear from evil spirits if we are full of the Holy Spirit. And the good news is that in these last times God has poured out his Spirit on all flesh. So we can all be filled with his Spirit, daily.

As Jesus taught his pupils to pray;

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

The kingdom of God comes through faith in the name of Jesus and the power of his Holy Spirit. His will is done through the Spirit writing His laws on our hearts. Our daily bread is that word which we need each day to strengthen us - supplied through the Holy Spirit. As Paul writes; "That you may be strengthened with his might in the inner man through the Spirit." And the power to deliver us from the evil one is our Father's. For his is the kingdom and the power and the Glory.

Part of our make up is our tendency to comply with what our peers ask of us. It is part of what makes us teachable and motivated to learn. In nursery school one can see how young children enjoy all doing the same thing, copying and imitating one another and the teacher. 'Simon Says'. Toddlers can be observed carefully

watching their parents shape words with their mouths and silently emulating their actions. These tendencies stay with us all our lives and are involved in many social phenomena, such as teenage fashions or life style fashions.

Social compliance is what makes some people susceptible to hypnosis. The more socially compliant we are, the more we conform to what others present to us as being a good idea.

Our innate desire to be compliant can be encouraged and heightened by small steps. This is exploited in many selling situations. Time-share salespersons may be offering handouts. You take the handout, out of politeness or embarrassment. You are now more ready to comply with the next step. This may be to go with the salesperson to take part in a draw to see what 'prize' you have won. Having complied to that extent you have shown yourself to be a potential target for the 'whole treatment'.

In supermarket design it is good practice to place an irresistible offer, a loss leader, near the entrance. Usually this will be something that every household needs daily at a give away price. This gets you to make your first purchase without too much thinking about it. Also there is the subliminal effect of seeing other people placing things into their trolleys without any resistance. The overall effect is designed to ensure you don't leave without having made the maximum amount of purchases.

I raise this point because you may have been wondering what could have been happening to Nicky when she was thrashing around during the bogus deliverance session. Or what could be happening in some religious meetings where folks keel over, the same folks at the same signal every week. Or folks go off singing in tongues at a musical signal every week. In each case it could be the genuine article or equally it could be social compliance. This same phenomenon is why some ordinary folks do the very strange things exhibited at hypnosis shows.

In a less dramatic way social compliance has always been exploited, though probably unknowingly, in religious services. The first step is in it being at an appointed ritual at an appointed time at an appointed place. Just by being there we have been compliant. Secondly we may be offered something as we enter, perhaps a hymnbook or notice sheet. This we compliantly accept. There may be ritual greeting behaviour, which we comply with while there is no way we would normally act in such a manner. We may be asked to stand up, turn around and greet the folk's behind/beside/in front of us. At this point we have more of a conscious choice whether to comply or not. During the course of the service we may be asked to stand, sit, kneel, bow heads, close eyes, raise hands, clap, sing, repeat something, change position.

By the end of the meeting some people who are highly socially compliant will be ready to do almost anything that is suggested or implied as being expected. Such as taking part in a conga dance around the church building! Coughing and spluttering as a supposed prelude to casting out of evil spirits, or taking up live poisonous snakes all bear witness to what it is possible to get folks to do.

Being aware of our susceptibilities is not going to diminish our faith. Far from it, awareness of social compliance and manipulation allows us to see the hand of God when he does move upon us. Our Father wants his children to walk in the light and to avoid the deception and cunning of men. And of the evil one.

Social compliance can be exploited in bogus deliverance ministry and amateur psychology masquerading as 'inner healing'.

Often the 'ministry team', who start off by casting demons out of every one in the assembly then go on to 'inner healing'. This is because having been established as one with a ministry, there comes a time when you have cast all the 'demons' out of the whole congregation and you need something else to do! Inner healing, like psychology, offers the prospect of an ongoing treatment, with the establishing of 'healer - patient' relationships which never really conclude. The possibilities for control and manipulation are frightening! For this reason

psychology should only be practised by qualified professionals who are not involved in the client's lives at any other level.

If you feel you really do have a psychological problem that needs attention then think about consulting a psychologist, having first consulted your doctor.

We all have some emotional hang-ups and they may be the products of our childhood. We are human beings! Less than perfect. We don't need a hang-up about our hang-ups. God loves us as we are, love yourself as you are! There is nothing wrong with most of us that could not be healed through real fellowship one with another.

Absalom wanted to be king, so he plotted to steal the hearts of the people. **2 Samuel 15**. In so doing he led the people away from their God appointed king, David, a figure of Christ our King. He spoke pleasingly to the people and drew them after himself. The result was division, death and sorrow.

A major impact of the 'demon casting out team' was to create awe, fear and dependency among the weak. Their 'ministry' was exalted above others local to the body. So they were able to control and divide the local assembly. Ultimately this culminated in the utter destruction of this particular group, scattering the flock. This is what the enemy is after always, to divide and rule - to rule and divide.

Let us beware the 'Absaloms' who exalt their 'ministry', seeking to draw others after themselves. They may have spectacular 'power' gift ministries, or may be phenomenal speakers or 'charismatic' in the human sense as Absalom was. But they seldom are in genuine community with the members of the local assembly. Rather they may come down from on high, to bless us. Often they will foster escapism from the true state of affairs locally, which should have us on our knees in repentance.

By contrast, the work of the Spirit in the local setting is to unify the body, enabling the members to humbly submit one to another out of reverence of the Christ.

CHAPTER 14: DECISIONS.

Okay, so you have been granted repentance to life. You have been baptised in the name of Jesus the Christ for the remission of your sins. You have been born of the Spirit by receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. . The assembly of the disciples of Jesus Christ is a mixed up mixture. What does one do?

That is the way that it is. Take it or leave it.

As for the institutional divisions, sects, organisations, ‘Churchianity’; why not leave it? But if one leaves, what does one have in its place? - I imagine you thinking. What would we do on Sundays? What would we tell the kids? When would we see our friends? Well, when one throws out junk from the house one does not immediately think - what will I replace it with? Instead one can enjoy the space created. The opportunity to be creative. Don’t Panic!

Yes, there is life after that which is called “Church”.

“But not as we know it”.

There is the opportunity to know the Lord Jesus Christ for oneself in everyday life, without trying to relate this new life especially to ‘meetings’. The opportunity to grow in faith relevant to our circumstances. The challenge of walking in the Spirit in the midst of an unclean generation. The opportunity to be knit together in love with fellow pupils/disciples of Jesus, on a one to one basis. This way you only have fellowship with those born of the Spirit since the way to know if someone is born of the Spirit is to get to know them. The life of Christ in one speaking to the life of Christ in another. Creating community does seem to take time and patience in the power and grace of God. We are weak vessels, but it is possible by his mighty power that works in us. It is even ordained and God’s plan for His children to be in families.

When weaned off a meeting centred life one undergoes a re-education process where being Spirit filled is not associated primarily with singing emotional songs, singing in tongues, and other meeting related phenomena. (Although I do sing in English and in tongues occasionally.) Instead, being filled with the Spirit means being able to cope with difficult situations at home, in relationships, at work, wherever. Claiming the victory for which Christ has set us free. But most importantly of all the Holy Spirit gives us the love of God with which to love one another in simple community.

Outside the treadmill of institutional life one is able to see perhaps more clearly the dearth of relationships where one has opportunity to practically share in each other’s lives and serve one another. How can we show the love of God to one another where we only see one another fleetingly at public gatherings and exchange pleasantries for a few moments as an addendum to the primary purpose of the meeting?

Free from such distractions we are able to see the challenge of making friends of God’s children, to quote the well-known hymn. Friendship for our Fathers sake and not as a by-product of being co-members of some religious group is no easy matter. At first it is foreign to us, to our shame. In many ways we do not know how to behave to one another outside of the framework of meetings or organisations. We may have become conditioned to have ‘spiritual’ times in meetings corporately and social times outside of the meeting routine or even one to one briefly after a meeting.

I have found by painful experience that while folks still hanker for some sort of structured grouping then attempts at true fellowship based solely on our being brothers have floundered. This is because the unspoken aims and agenda of ‘the mission’ can take priority over being open and caring for one another. No man can serve two masters. It is difficult to serve our brother and serve an institution. Usually the institution or mission will take priority. This can be because whether in our subconscious or in our consciousness we take it for granted that our institution or mission is God’s idea and therefore to serve this is synonymous with serving God.

This then has priority over the needs of individuals. The institution may be very visible while the kingdom of God is a city without walls, built in love. It is difficult enough with our lifestyles to have genuine community with our brothers and sisters in our localities. There are only twenty-four hours in the day, only seven days in the week, something has to give!

It may be helpful to recognise that we are people who like routines and regular schedules. We prefer not having to think about what we are going to do with our time. If it were a blank sheet then we would have responsibility to use the time constructively. We seem to prefer the time being plotted out for us. An organisation sees to that nicely. Or alternatively we could really be led by the Spirit and so be the sons of God.

However when we do start to live in fellowship with other individuals we can have the joy of serving one another and being served in the love of God in a spontaneous or 'live' manner as well as in a planned, thought out way.

Suddenly the ministry gifts of the Spirit make sense and are relevant as we see them operating effectively to encourage and build up actual people we are in contact with. Living in fellowship must not be restricted to meetings where some pattern or ritual is enacted, for example songs, prayer, Bible study, cup of tea and chat. If we do again become meeting centred then true fellowship, individual to individual may not take place.

When I was asked to 'withdraw from the fellowship' in 1982, my wife, some friends and myself started to meet together. We would sing songs, study some scripture and have a cup of tea and a sandwich or whatever. We hadn't a clue as to how to be together. We just had meetings like we were used to in the formal group. This is perfectly natural. People who spend a long time in institutions like a children's home, or a mental home, or a prison become institutionalised. That is they get used to having the laundry done for them. Meals are provided at regular times. A social agenda is provided. 'If we are playing Bingo, it must be Tuesday'.

Escaping is both exhilarating and frightening.

I am sure the very thought of 'coming out' will be totally unthinkable to most folks. But the point is that we can only stand out as the Body of Jesus Christ through the demonstration of the love of God in true one to one fellowship and community. 'Coming out' is not leaving people. It is putting organisations in their correct place so that our only tie to one another is the love of God shed abroad in our hearts.

When the Holy Spirit challenged me to face the fact that I had become a 'pupil of John' rather than a pupil of Jesus the conflict of trying to be both dawned on me. (Some of the pupils of John the Baptist continued to be his pupils after the revealing of Jesus as the Messiah and John's declaration of the same. Loyal but dumb. As mentioned earlier, Paul also found some pupils in Ephesus who had been immersed with John's immersion and stuck there, possibly as a result of the teaching of Apollos. We can't be the pupils of men and of Jesus at the same time.) Nevertheless the idea of leaving 'my church' was out of the question. I had made such a commitment to its being established. All that money we had paid in through tithes and offerings! The relationships we thought we had with the folks. All the time and effort put in through the early, tough times. It was ours for goodness' sake! When one day my wife came out and said, "I think it would be best if we left Carmel", I couldn't entertain the thought. I replied, "If God wants us out then he will have to throw us out." Six months later he did just that!

He appears to have been busy throwing a lot of people out! I couldn't tell you to come out. I would encourage you to ask your Father what you should do. To look to Jesus, the beginner and completer of our faith. I would ask you to view having to leave 'Churchianity' – playing at Churches - behind as a very strong possibility. Rather I would urge that we make every effort to fulfil our Lord's commandment that we love one another. Perhaps it would help if we thought of it as 'one loving another one'. The more we get involved with other real people who are fellow pupils of Jesus then the less we become ensnared in the web of institutional life. The

more we obey God, the less we are likely to obey our natural desires or follow men. Let us see that we get together to pray often.

Ultimately be prepared for the possibility of being asked, 'in love', if you wouldn't be happier somewhere else. If this happens, remember Who's you are and see it as being freed from a log jam.

To sum up.

That which is commonly called the Church is a mixture of those born of the Spirit and those not re-born because it is mostly split into institutions which function equally well with saved and unsaved members and officials. What is called 'Church' is not the assembly of the Christ. 'Church' is of man. The assembly that Jesus is building is not built with human hands but entirely on a foundation of the message of repentance and remission of sins and the heavenly revelation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

The ultimate test of re-birth is love for one another in the power of the Spirit. Fellowship where believers are knit together in this love without institutional conditions is true fellowship and the Spirit in those believers will see to it that those folk are blessed, nourished, encouraged and cared for through each other by His mighty power in those earthen vessels.

Such fellowship without walls strangely enough tends to regulate itself and almost automatically inhibits folks not born of the Spirit from trying to join them. As it says in **Acts 5:13** "Of the rest, none dared to join them." On the other hand, all through Acts we see that those who did believe the message of repentance and faith in the name of Jesus; and did receive the Holy Spirit; joined the assembly of the saints. Attendees who are not born of the Spirit will prefer to be part of an organisation, as may also lukewarm, compromised believers.

In comparison it is not unusual today for many that believe, or so they say, not to join with other saints in serving relationships. At the same time many that patently have not received the Spirit do join the organisations.

I wouldn't suggest that we try to correct matters by throwing out those not born of the Spirit and dragging believers in. A re-alignment of those born of the Spirit, joining one another in love as fellow pupils of Jesus in genuine serving relationships, assembling house to house, continuing in prayer; will accomplish the aim of itself.

CHAPTER 15: “WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU TO DO, DO IT

These words were spoken by Mary the mother of Jesus at a Wedding in Cana. Mary had been invited to what we assume was some relation's wedding and naturally Jesus was invited also. This wedding obviously wasn't teetotal and I suppose some folks were only there for the wine, which could be expected to flow liberally at such a festive occasion. Imagine the embarrassment when the host was informed that the wine had ran out well before the festivities could be decently drawn to a close.

For us to appreciate fully the scale of the drama we would need to live in a similar culture, which offered few material benefits and comforts compared to ours. In such an environment food and drink have an enhanced importance. Good food and wine were the substance of feasts and parties whereas in our festivities the food and drink may well be incidental, pleasant or otherwise. To those on a limited diet mostly of staple foods and water, wine would be most highly appreciated and the lack of wine would be most disappointing.

No one appears to have gone to Jesus with the problem. Why should they, as Jesus hadn't started His ministry and they were not aware of His power and authority.

But Mary observed the situation. Here was a problem that Mary could not solve, but she knew in her heart that Jesus was the person to whom problems should be addressed. And so she directed the servants of the house to Jesus with the words; “Whatever He tells you to do, do it.”

It was just as well that she said this as Jesus told them to do an apparently foolish thing in the circumstances. He told them to fill the biggest vessels in the house with water. All credit to the servants in that they obeyed Him and did this ‘to the brim’. We can imagine their surprised pleasure when the master of ceremonies tasted the wine that was drawn from these vessels and pronounced it to be of the very best, even better than the original supply. (And there was now about one hundred and eighty gallons of the stuff!). Try to rid your mind of the Hollywood picture of Jesus in an outstandingly white robe with the best suntan you ever saw: With dramatic voice and gestures when He spoke. Remember His own brothers did not recognise Him as the Christ, the Son of God. He was perfectly ordinary, the Son of Man. The Spirit also has always spoken in a ‘still, small voice’. Obedience is of faith, not gullibility.

The assembly of the saints has many similarities to a wedding. A wedding is about the joining together of people into one unit, as is the Body of the Christ. It is meant to be a joyous and social experience. But what about when the wine runs out?

The higher the expectations, the deeper the disappointment when those expectations are unfulfilled. People have a good right to have high expectations of the sons of the kingdom, the saints in light. The wine of the Holy Spirit should be flowing within us and overflowing from us. A lack of the overflowing of the Holy Spirit, it must be said, cannot be made up for by a surfeit of enthusiasm and effort, although such may create a diversion and distract attention for a while.

When it comes to our notice that the new wine of the Holy Spirit is running short or has petered out altogether it is good not to deny this, to pretend that it has not happened. Far better to acknowledge, “We have run out of wine.” We may go to some worthy to confess this but ultimately we must go to Jesus with the problem. Thank God that Jesus is able and willing to rectify this situation. If we go to Jesus, tell him the problem, listen to what He tells us to do, and if we do what He tells us to do, then we will have new wine better than the first. He will use ordinary, common material like you and me, transformed by his glorious power.

Thank you for reading the book up to this point. I do hope it has been of some use to you. But this book won't really fix things for any of us. Thank God we have a person in Jesus the Christ who is become all things to us.

He is reachable, touchable, and actually wants us to keep on abiding in Him. The woman with the issue of blood was able to press through the crowd and touch the hem of His garment. The friends of the paralysed man who was let down through the tiled roof were able to get him into the presence of Jesus. If we want to enough, we too can get through to touch Him, and to have Him touch us. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life – we can never get past that fact. Words, theories, even truth will not do in us what only touching the living, abiding Christ can do.

It is wonderful that we can go to Jesus! He is approachable. He is concerned about our problems and needs. He wants to tell us what we must do. Notice He doesn't wave a magic wand. It's no good going to Jesus and expecting Him to fix everything. He relies on us doing what He tells us to do! We are His workmanship and His fellow workers.

Now I am not going to guess what He may tell you to do. That's between Him and you. (See chapter on leaders.)

Having gone to Jesus and listened to Him the thing is to do whatever He tells you to do. Don't mull it over. Don't ask other people what they think. Procrastination is another way to disobey.

When many people were coming to Jesus to ask Him what they should do he told them the parable of the house built on sand and the house built on the rock.

He said that those who hear His words and do not do what He says are like someone building a house on sand. Storms demolish such a house. But the one who hears what Jesus says and does it is like a man building a house on rock. The storms still come but the house stands. This parable shows that His voice does not automatically result in human obedience. The winds and the waves obey Him, but we have a will which we must yield to Him.

As is mentioned many times in scripture it is not hearing the word of God but doing it that achieves the purposes of God. Joshua was told; "Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses." God had told Moses what land and nations he was giving to the people of Israel, but Israel had to get up and go there. This was going to take courage, faith and obedience. They were going to have to fight. Some of us will have to repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins. Some need to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. We will have to walk in community, walk in breaking bread house to house. Walk in continuing in prayers together. This we can do in the power of the Spirit whom God gives to those that obey Him. Abiding in the Christ we cannot fail to bear fruit.

This book is not written to tell you what you should do other than that you should go to Jesus and do what he tells you to do.

Personally I see a great lack in the saints. In Britain in many places the wine ran out long ago. In some places it has been replaced with orange or blackcurrant juice and the guests seem to be quite content. I don't want to be content with less than that which God intends for the Bride of Christ. Jesus certainly will not be.

I leave you fully persuaded that God is able to restore fully all the inheritance of the kingdom to his saints. It is still however a case of whosoever will, may come. I hope that this book has encouraged you to seek the best that God has for you, for those who seek Him, find Him.

Matthew 5:3 "Ask and it shall be given. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will open unto you."

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the clean in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed are you when they reproach you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you, lying because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, because your reward is great in the heavens. For so they persecuted the prophets before you.”

Quick, let's go to Jesus.

Comments welcome to the author, Colin Thompson, Gateshead, England via email
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Recommended Further Reading.

- Watchman Nee, *The Body of Christ - A Reality*; Christian Fellowship Publishers, ISBN 0-935008-13-6.
- Watchman Nee, *Back To The Cross*; Christian Fellowship Publishers, ISBN 0-935008-70-5.
- Watchman Nee, *Further Talks on the Church Life*; Living Stream Ministries, ISBN 0-87083-003-1.
- Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Church Life*; Living Stream Ministries, ISBN 0-87083-027-9.
- Watchman Nee, *Release of the Spirit*; New Wine Press, ISBN 0-947852-02-6.